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Class of 2010

Udayan Care

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Class of 1978 Foundation Grant Write-Up

In accordance with the grant proposal I submitted to the organization, I spent the summer in India working for and a non-governmental organization called Udayan Care.

Udayan Care was founded in 1994 in memory of Udayan Modi, the son of Udayan Care's founder, who died tragically while a college student. He expressed a desire to help the orphaned children of India, and his mother, Dr. Kiran Modi, established Udayan Care to further this goal. More than 18 million orphaned and abandoned children live on the streets in India. In the nation's capital, Delhi, 500,000 children (of 13 million residents) live on the streets. In such a dire situation, Udayan Care set out to help these children. Despite the overwhelming scope of the tragedy of orphaned and abandoned children in India, however, Udayan Care's mission has always focused on quality rather than quantity. From the beginning, it was founder Dr. Kiran Modi's mission to treat each child under the aegis of the organization as if he or she were Dr. Modi's own child.

The flagship program that Udayan Care runs is the "Ghar" program. These Ghars—or homes in Hindi—take in orphan, abandoned, and abused children and are best described as a hybrid of a foster home and a traditional orphanage. Most of them house between ten and twenty children, though the largest Ghar, Jag Shanti, is home to forty-five girls. What makes the Ghar program truly extraordinary is its commitment to giving its children the highest quality of care. Each Ghar is led by a mentor-mother or a mentor-father; these mentor parents commit to be the legal guardians of each child that lives in his or her home for the child's whole life. In addition, the children are provided optimal medical and psychological care to meet the challenges that many of them face from years of malnourishment, trauma, and abuse. All of Udayan Care's children, further, are sent to the best private schools in India and provided with extensive tutoring when they need help in school.

I spent last summer in the Jag Shanti Udayan Care Ghar. This home houses about forty five girls, ranging in age from four to eighteen. While I was there, I helped the girls with their school work, helped them get ready for school, made sure they showered and brushed their teeth, helped cook meals, and, most importantly, established a soccer program for the girls. Initially the soccer program was devised for all of the children, but it soon became clear that the older children had too many responsibilities between housework and homework to have soccer practices on a regular basis. The younger children, however, absolutely loved soccer and we began practicing every day. After the first few weeks, the only thing they ever wanted to do

was play soccer. They would demand that we start soccer practices earlier and that they run later. While I insisted that practices start no earlier than 6pm and end before dark (to make sure they had time for homework and to limit their exposure to the Indian heat), their enthusiasm was very encouraging and refreshing.

It was fun for me to see how each of the children benefitted from the program in their own way. The more outgoing children found an outlet for their energy that helped minimize conflicts in the rest of the day. The quieter children found a way to assert themselves, and really gained self-awareness and self-confidence. The older children began to learn how to lead the other children, both vocally and by example. The younger children, on the other hand, relished the opportunity to be involved with the older children and be a part of a team. I really feel that each of the children I worked with gained something from the soccer program. When I left at the end of the summer, I was hopeful that the children would manage to keep the soccer program going on their own and that they would continue to learn and grow through the sport.

When I received the grant from the Class of 1978 to return to India this summer, therefore, I was absolutely thrilled. I had spent a year away from them missing them terribly, and I could not wait to see them again. I hoped that they would be just as excited to see me. When I walked back into the orphanage on June 15 of this summer, any fears I had disappeared. All of the girls were waiting for me at the gate of the house and all jumped on me at once. I spent an hour hugging all of them over and over again, overwhelmed by how much I had missed them and how wonderful it felt to be back.

I am one of the few volunteers who have ever returned to Jag Shanti Udayan Care after their first visit. Most volunteers come to the home, spend a few weeks or a month there, and then leave. For almost all of the volunteers I have talked to, it has been an amazing experience for them. But for the children, it means that a lot of people come in and out of their lives all the time. Each of the volunteers tries to teach the children something that they leave with them, but I think very few volunteers leave a lasting impression on the children and become significant figures in their lives. I did not know what it would be like returning to the orphanage, but I realized in my time this summer that it allowed me to form the kind of relationship with the children that they do not have with very many people. By returning, I showed them that I wanted to be a permanent figure in their lives (which I do), and for children who have been orphaned, abandoned, and abused, I think this is a tremendously significant thing. Of all the things I could give them, I think this is the most important. I am so happy that the Class of 1978 allowed me to do this, and for these children it has made a huge difference.

Upon returning, however, I learned that the soccer program had collapsed in my absence. Some of the children said the soccer equipment had been taken away by the guards. Others claimed that the children refused to listen to the captains I left in place to run the program. Others claimed that

the soccer balls I left had all been popped. Regardless of the causes, the children were thrilled that I was back to run soccer practices. I knew that I would have to make different arrangements to keep practices going once I left, but my first goal was to get practices running again. I held practice my first day back, and the children were more enthusiastic than ever.

What I did not expect, however, was the new enthusiasm for the program that the Director of the orphanage had developed in my absence. During my first week there, he called me into his office to discuss the future of the program. He was thrilled that I was back to get the soccer program going again and determined that it should survive after I left. While he had always been supportive of the program, his sudden ardor surprised me. I learned in the first few minutes of the meeting, however, that it had occurred to him that if I formed a soccer team that team would be able to compete against other teams. The director is a retired General in the Indian army and, I discovered, is also a big fan of competition. He agreed to arrange matches against other Udayan Care homes and, if they would agree, with teams from schools from the surrounding area.

With the director involved as he had never been before, the soccer program really took off. We started practicing twice a day, and the girls really started to show significant improvement. It seemed that the more we practiced, the more the girls wanted to play. The heat wave that kept midday temperatures around 120 degrees for weeks could do nothing to dampen their spirits. They still begged me to extend practice to two or three hours each morning and each night. In between practices, furthermore, I would find them kicking around a bottle or a doll. It was so inspiring to see.

That is not to say that there were not ups and downs. As the girls became more invested in soccer, they began to quarrel more, as well. Some of the girls would get annoyed when small children were put on their team during scrimmages. I made a point of dealing with this very harshly. Soccer had given many of the girls—particularly the smallest and the shyest—a new assertiveness and self-confidence. The absolute last thing I wanted was for social pressures to interfere with the tremendous progress they had made. When the children began teasing each other in this way, therefore, I would give them a warning and if it did not stop I would cancel practice. Because of their great love of the game, this proved to be the most effective method of discipline. By the time I left the home, relations among the girls had greatly improved. They really started to work as a team and understand the importance of this camaraderie.

The revival of the soccer program was a great success. With the program firmly reestablished, however, the challenge of establishing it more permanently persisted. The director of the orphanage was very helpful. He promised to take a more active role in monitoring soccer practices (since his revelation about competition he had become very dedicated). He also promised that he would take over as the disciplinarian, agreeing to act as a mediator between fighting children during practice times. I also took more

decisive steps with the children to ensure that they would keep the program going. I chose new captains for the team, and in the last few weeks I was there I turned practices over to them. By participating in the captains' practices, I showed the children that I respected the captains. This, I hoped, would help the captains exercise more authority once I left. I took steps, finally, to ensure that any equipment problems that may have caused the breakdown in the soccer program the previous year would not recur. I had conversations with the director and the security guards to ensure that the equipment (at the appropriate time of day) would always be available to the children. Perhaps more importantly, I managed to get the girls brand new equipment from an organization called Coaches Across Continents. They sent me new balls, cones, and—excitingly—new uniforms for all of the girls. To say that the girls were ecstatic about their new uniforms would be an understatement. They could not stop looking at their reflections in the windows all over the house. Some of the children wanted to wear them all of the time, and others wanted to keep them neatly folded in their cupboards to keep them from getting dirty. I gave the girls the uniforms as a farewell gift, and I think they made the girls feel like a real team. And, I have to say, they were so cute running around in their matching uniforms.

I have been in touch with the Director of the orphanage and a lot of the girls on the soccer team since I left, and it seems as if the soccer program has continued to run smoothly. The girls' first match against another Udayan Care home is coming up in mid-October. They could not be more excited. I have been getting emails from the girls telling me all about it. I am really hopeful that things will continue as they are now and that playing a real game together will bring the girls even closer. I think they can still learn so much from soccer, and I hope it remains an important part of their lives. I think that during this past trip, I made changes that will allow the program to continue in my absence.

In my time back in the United States, further, I have continued to work with Udayan Care. The head of the organization, Dr. Kiran Modi, confided to me that it was a goal of hers to secure 501(c)(3) status for Udayan Care in the United States. This would make donations tax deductible and would, she hopes, increase donations from the United States. The economic crisis around the world has really hurt the organization, and this type of increase would help Udayan Care to continue to provide the amazing services it does and allow it to continue to expand. I have, consequently, taken on the project and have started working with a clinic at the University of North Carolina Law School to make Dr. Modi's goal a reality. We hope to have all of the necessary paperwork finished by the end of the semester.

All of my work with Udayan Care, both this summer and through the semester, was made possible by the generosity of the Class of 1978. I want to thank you so much for all of your help; you have really enriched my life and, I hope, the lives of the forty-five girls at Jag Shanti Udayan Care.





