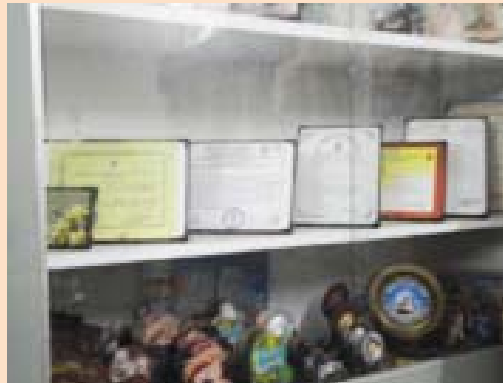




## My visit to the Baby Sarah Orphanage —by Udita Shah

The Baby Sarah Orphanage is run by Kartikeyan who looked to me to be just out of college. Word has it he is around 25. Here is a photo of him.



When you speak to this infinitely patient soft spoken gentleman it's a different matter. The compassion for the children he cares for and the passion with which he goes about it is heartwarming.

He explains to us that this orphanage is mainly for children who are abandoned either by the parents, or by relatives after the death of the parents. On some occasions they have had children who have been rescued from parents who are ill-treating or abusing them. While he was telling us all this we had several children walk in and out of the office room with Kartikeyan patiently sending them out.

After this session in his office we went into the main hall of the orphanage. This was a different experience all together. The moment we stepped out, there was a warm welcome with children our shaking hands, asking our names, some pulling us to join them in their activity. Some of the children had gone to school (the older ones), but the younger ones and the special needs children were there. They were in class. They have so much to complain about, yet they were so happy with so little... this was definitely something I could learn from them.



There were children of all ages. Kartikeyan told us he had children starting from 3-4 all the way to children who are 32 years old. The mentally challenged had classes on the premises itself while the other children went to school. The aim was for the children to be independent of the help from the home by the time they are 23.



All the normal children there do a little bit to help the mentally challenged children, whether it is bathing them or in any other way. It is amazing how these children have bonded so well with each other and with the staff. There was a 22 year old girl Soumya, herself with disabilities taking care of another 12 year old Saranyadevi. Apparently Soumya helps feed, bathe and take care of Saranyadevi like a mother. Saranyadevi only eats from Soumya and no one else. When we gave them biscuits, Soumya patiently fed the Saranyadevi and only then started eating herself.

Well now we get to one of the main reasons of our visit. We had collected between us in the Pondicherry office and HFI some contributions for the Joy of Giving Week that we used to buy a washing machine for this home, and some biscuits for the children. The new washing machine was as much a thrill for them as just seeing them happy was for us. The photographs that follow speak for themselves I'm sure.



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