On the streets of Vijayawada

A 1989 UNICEF report estimated that Vijayawada is home to 19,800 street children — alternatively known as *Adukkune Pillalu* (children who beg), *Veedhi Balalu* (street children) or the Railway Platform *meeda adharapadi jeevinchu pillalu* (Railway Platform children). Such a figure includes those who live in the streets or the railway station, those who are orphans and homeless, and those from the surrounding slums who work in the streets.The typical street kid is a boy between 11 and 13 years of age; a large majority are Hindu and belong to castes that the government designated as "backward."

The survey conducted by the Forum for Child Rights in May 2001 has counted 235 children — on average, 33 a day — who arrived at the Vijayawada railway station over the course of a single week. Vijayawada's "main attractions" — abundance of cheap, tasty food, availability of water to drink and bathe, ease of finding employment, and the presence of over 40 movie theaters (by far, the children's favorite pass-time) charging a mere 4 Rupees (10 cents) for admission — render the city a particularly popular destination for runaway children.

On the streets, they may be found working a variety of jobs: they clean train compartments; they collect plastic, aluminium, paper, and anything else they may be able to resell; they serve as paperboys, shoeshiners, dishwashers, or porters for hotels and local businesses; they play music, juggle, or simply beg. They can earn as little as 10 Rupees a day (25 cents), while their daily income rarely exceeds 100 Rupees ($2.50). Their lifestyle exposes them to many grave risks. Sniffing toxic substances like glue and other solvents is commonplace. In addition, their lifestyle often puts them at high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS. According to a United Nations report, one-half of Vijayawada's street children have a sexually transmitted disease or infection.

Since 1991, Care+Share has rescued over 700 kids from the streets of Vijayawada. Over 500 are housed in our Daddy's Home village.

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Where We Work

some quick facts about India, Andhra Pradesh, and the city of Vijayawada

Those "who wear cotton clothes, use the decimal system, enjoy the taste of [curried] chicken, play chess, or roll dice, and seek peace of mind or tranquility through meditation," writes historian Stanley Wolpert, "are indebted to India." India's deep-rooted civilization may appear exotic or even inscrutable to casual foreign observers, but a perceptive individual can see its evolution, shaped by a wide range of factors: extreme climatic conditions, a bewildering diversity of people, a host of competing political overlords (both local and outsiders), enduring religious and philosophical beliefs, and complex linguistic and literary developments that led to the flowering of regional and pan-Indian culture during the last three millennia. India is the world's largest democracy and the seventh-most industrialized country in the world, the underpinnings of India's civilization stem primarily from its own social structure, religious beliefs, philosophical outlook, and cultural values. The continuity of those time-honed traditional ways of life has provided unique and fascinating patterns in the tapestry of contemporary Indian civilization.

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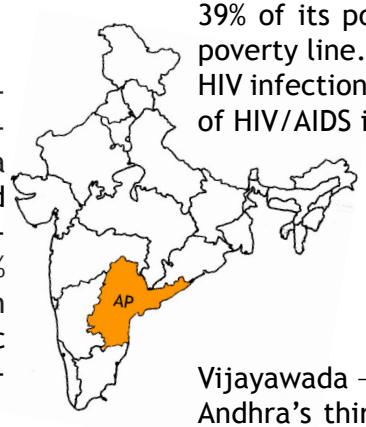
India

India is a large, triangular-shaped country in southern Asia, buttressed by the long sweep of the Himalaya in the north and protruding into the Indian Ocean in the south. India covers a land area of some 3,287,000 sq km (1,281,930sq mi). India is the second most populous country in the world with a population of 1.03 billion. Almost 40% of them are below 15 years of age. About 70% of the people live in more than 550,000 villages; the remainder in more than 200 towns and cities. Despite fast-paced economic growth, poverty remains widespread. 26 percent of the population lives below the income poverty line.

Over thousands of years of its history, India has been invaded from the Iranian plateau, Central Asia, Arabia, Afghanistan, and the West; Indian people and culture have absorbed and changed these influences to produce a remarkable racial and cultural synthesis. Religion, caste, and language are major determinants of social and political organization in India today. The government has recognized 16 languages as official; Hindi is the most widely spoken. India's major religion, Hinduism, is practiced by approximately 80% of the population. Significant religious minorities include Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains.

Andhra Pradesh

With a population of 76 million, Andhra Pradesh - located on the Deccan plateau - is the fifth largest Indian state. Andhra is well known for its legendary dynasties, its rich literature, its melodious Telugu language, the vibrant Kuchipudi dance,the swarming pilgrimage destinations of Puttaparthi and Tirupati, and the more recent Ramoji Film City, one of the world's largest and best equipped movie studios. Thanks to its massive agricultural production, it is often known as India's "rice bowl." Today, in spite of the aggressive campaign undertaken by the state government to transform it into the "number one state" — primarily through the heavy investments in information technology that have attracted the praise of the likes of Bill Gates and President Clinton — Andhra remains a largely poor state. As of 2004, its per capita income was about US$503 (World Bank).



39% of its population is illiterate and about 15% live below the poverty line. In addition, Andhra has the highest concentration of HIV infections in the entire Indian Union. One of every ten victims of HIV/AIDS in India lives in Andhra Pradesh.

The city of Vijayawada

Vijayawada — sitting on the banks of the sacred river Krishna — is Andhra's third largest city, after the capital Hyderabad and the port city of Vishakapatnam. It is inhabited by an estimated population of 1.2 million. With more than 200 long-distance trains passing through every day, it is one of the nation's busiest railway junctions. Moreover, National Highways 5 and 9 — which connect Delhi, Mumbai, and Calcutta with the south of India — bring a steady flow of trucks and buses. Because of its very accessibility, more than 40,000 people — among them, scores of street children — migrate to the city every year. Most of them come here from rural and coastal Andhra to escape underdevelopment, unemployment, water scarcity, or food shortages.

A high percentage of Vijayawada's population still lives in the miserable makeshift homes made of scrap plastic, tarp, and mud that litter its landscape.

Slums have arisen just about everywhere: around markets, bus terminals, swamps, warehouses, along the river Krishna and the city's many canals. 320,000 people — approximately 30 percent of the population — are amassed in over 220 slums. These sprawling slums, which are quite different from one another, share a total lack of hygiene and sanitation. In such god-forsaken places, where many parents cannot provide for their children's most basic necessities, the children are often forced to look out for themselves the best they can.