

Care+Share

give children their childhood back our vision and strategy

A drop in the ocean. In the grand scheme of things, that may be a fair characterization of the work we do. In spite of the staggering economic growth experienced in recent years, India is still home to millions of indigent children. Many of them — according to some estimates, 18 million of them — are forced to live in the streets by the loss of their loved ones, the breakdown of their families, or simply because they no longer could endure the abuses inflicted upon them by parents, relatives, and employers. Many more — all too often illiterate, sick, and malnourished — live in neglect in the miserable makeshift homes made of scrap plastic, tarp, and mud that litter the landscape of every Indian city. Clearly, the problem is so inveterate and so ubiquitous that appreciable social change lies well beyond the reach of any single humanitarian organization. However, for each individual child — the drops in this especially dark, deep ocean — humanitarian assistance is the difference between a life of wretchedness, misery, and despair and a fulfilling, self-affirming life lived as a productive member of the local community. Our intervention is designed to snap the self-reinforcing cycle of poverty, ignorance, and disease — one life, one child, one family at a time.

Attending to the most fundamental needs of children constitutes an important part of our work. Individual sponsorships, in fact, cover just that: food, clothing, education, and in some cases housing. Along the same lines, we regularly distribute milk in some of Vijayawada's poorest slums, build artificial limbs in our Asha Kiran rehabilitation center, provide parents with rickshaws, pushcarts, sewing machines, and other equipment they can use to supplement their families' income, and offer emergency relief in the wake of natural calamities such as the 2004 tsunami or the 2005 flooding of the river Krishna. Our objectives, nonetheless, go far beyond providing some meager, palliative assistance that simply allows someone to fight another day. Our mission is to transform the lives of children, return them the ability to dream, provide them with the means, the confidence, and the self-image they need to fully realize their potential, and help them bloom into healthy, self-reliant individuals. Caring for children who still remember being abandoned, have witnessed the murder of their parents, or have experienced the betrayal of being sexually abused by the people they most trusted cannot simply involve feeding them some rice, giving them a clean t-shirt, or handing them some books. Once their most basic needs are satisfied, their full rehabilitation requires that we give them their childhood back.

In our village of *Daddy's Home*, which houses more than 500 kids, *Care+Share* does much more than feed, treat, and educate children. At *Daddy's Home*, we allow them to be kids again and to live in a beautifully lush, clean, and caring environment where we as much as possible provide them with the attention and love typical of a family. They have enough space to run around, the facilities to play — a soccer field, a basketball court, a gym, and cricket grounds — and the chance to express their many talents through extra-curricular activities such as modern and traditional dance. Here, giving children happiness, security, and a sense of belonging represents as much of a priority as their academic and professional development.

It is our focus on individuality and self-realization and the distinctly personal touch of our programs that distinguish *Care+Share* from other humanitarian organizations. Our greatest strength is precisely our incisive presence on the ground and our knowledge of the local territory, culture, and people. To geographical expansion we prefer to grow by deepening the reach of our activities and our transformative role in the local communities of Andhra Pradesh. Unlike most other organizations, we directly implement the programs we fund: we run our own nursery, our own kindergarten, our own school, our own campus, and our own medical facilities. It is our staff, our volunteers, and our board members that investigate the family background of indigent children, personally hand out the sponsorship money, or take the children out shopping, to the circus, to the amusement park, or just for an ice-cream. This hands-on approach — while costly and demanding — allows us to minimize the waste and mismanagement of resources. For all intents and purposes, we remain largely a “mom-and-pop” operation. It is no coincidence, in this regard, that our founders Carol Faison and Noel Harper are simply known as “mommy” and “daddy” throughout the city of Vijayawada.

The success of our actions is measured by the look in the eyes of the children we have rescued from a life of deprivation, ignorance, and abuse. It is only when those eyes return to reflect the enthusiasm, the hopefulness, and the imaginativeness of a child — not the weariness and the disillusionment of someone forced to grow up too soon — that we consider our mission to be accomplished. It is only when those eyes return to exude the confidence that comes with feeling like an integral part of a loving family — not the insecurity and the vulnerability of life on the streets — that we deem our work to be done. It is only when those eyes return to mirror a happy, radiant soul that we have truly made a difference.

Federico Ferrara
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