

Volunteers Remember...!

In this section, you will find some heartfelt sharing by the volunteers and visitors who came over last 15 years. They spent time at Vatsalya doing whatever they could do to help us enhance the quality of life we try to make possible for the children and women we work with.

.....

Charlotte, Denmark Denmark, 2008

Dear Jaimala and Hitesh!

I want to say thank you for another great stay at Udayan!
I had the greatest summer here with all of you in Vatsalya and I just don't know where the time went, but looking at my "To do List" for this summer, I understand why summer went by so fast☺!!

To do List:

- Finishing Andrea's Tile Project
- Balloon Dance on Canada Day
- Treasure hunt and water balloon fight for Amanda's departure (with Mango, Chips and Soda)
- Painting the Nursery on the inside and the bathrooms
- Helping with washing the small children after the school
- Working on the Housekeeping Course
- Meeting with the hotel owners about internship for children and selling the Anoothi jewellery
- Being "In Charge" of the internship group of children in Jaipur for one week
- Presentation on Danish Culture to children and staff of Udayan
- Washing the carpets that we sit on for every meal
- Gardening and kitchen work
- Cleaning the basketball court for balloons after water balloon fight
- Organizing the Sand Castle competition
- Making Chocolate Cake on the previous day of my departure

I loved every project that I set my mind on doing- It has been a great challenge!
I came here not knowing that I was to work on the Housekeeping Course and the internship and I admit that I had doubts about my own skills in these projects but it was nice being pushed and much fun to work with-Thank you for believing in me!
You are both a huge inspiration to me and great role models as you managed to do the same thing that I want to do, which in one sentence is:
TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD

I will keep following the developments in Udayan and Vatsalya by reading your emails and the websites, as it will always bring warmth and joy to my heart, knowing that a place like this exists in this world.....Until the day when I hopefully return. Thank you for your help and all that you are doing.

**Much love,
Charlotte, Denmark**

One day at Vatsalya's Udayan: By Delta Donohue, USA May, 2008

I entered the gates and was driven slowly up the path. Children began running by the car, waving and saying "Namaste, Didi, Namaste." This was my first exposure to this wonderful place called Udayan. The name means rising and moving ahead. A perfect description for what occurs in this children's village. Udayan was formed to provide a home and loving environment for orphaned and abandoned children. This village is one of the many projects of Vatsalya, an NGO run with extraordinary vision and leadership by Jaimala and Hitesh Gupta.

There are currently 51 children living in Udayan. They range in age from 4 – 16. The open-air campus consists of multiple residential units, a kitchen/dining hall, staff quarters, school buildings for Nursery through 8th grade, a library, sports and recreation areas, a meditation hall, and several vocational areas providing training in carpentry, tailoring, baking, dairy farming while meeting many of the Udayan's daily needs. Crops are grown on-site providing vegetables for the village and fodder for the animals. Thousands of plants and trees have been planted over the 25 hectares providing splashes of flowers and color in the arid land.

The village is forward thinking and ecologically conscious. Recent grants have provided solar lighting for the pathways and a solar cooker to assist with meal preparation. Plastic products are actively avoided and children are taught from the very beginning to care for their environment and utilize the small dustbins that are located throughout the campus.

Udayan's children have difficult life stories. Some ran away from home when they were as young as four years old. Some were orphaned. Some have parents that can't afford to care for them. Many were abused. Many have histories that include interactions with drugs and alcohol.

What is a typical day at Udayan? The thought makes me smile because there are no typical days at Udayan. Each brings its own surprises and delights. On the whole, however, the days are quite full. The children rise early to bathe and dress for school. The campus has a deliberate design separating the residences from the school buildings. Udayan's founders wanted the children to know and understand the importance of 'going' to school. After breakfast and brief exercise, they head for a school day from 9-1:30.

I have spent much of my volunteer school time working with the Nursery. These are children of Pre-Kindergarten age and/or skill level. Under certain circumstances, Udayan also welcomes local village children into their school. In the Nursery, we concentrate on language acquisition, both Hindi and English, shapes, colors, and numbers. We utilize song and story at every opportunity to enhance the learning opportunities.

After the school day, the children return to the residences to change and wash. The lunch bell typically sounds around 2:00 and everyone heads to the dining hall for a hearty lunch. The Udayan menu is completely vegetarian and prepared by two very gifted chefs. Food is plentiful and never wasted. After lunch there is a rest period for the younger children and a study period for the older children.

Sports bell rings at 4:00 and games of basketball, volleyball, cricket, kabaddi and other sports rotate on various days. A quiet time of prayer and meditation occurs before dinner

within Aradhana, the meditation hall. Udayan is a place where all faiths are welcome and honored. Dinner concludes by about 7:30 and then the evening can be filled with study, reading and preparing for the next day. Udayan has recently gained access to satellite TV and some evenings now include excited viewing of The Discovery Channel and Animal Planet. Of course, children being children, they would always vote to watch a movie. Bollywood does indeed reign! After a very full day the children return to their beds for a good night's rest.

While the campus and facilities are extraordinary, it is the staff that truly makes Udayan and its children thrive. Everyone, from the Aunties and Uncles, the Teachers, and the Administrator, demonstrates a deep commitment to the underlying mission of Udayan and displays their love and care for the children on a daily basis. I watched Karan, the wonderful Cook of Udayan observe a young girl struggle to tie her shoes. He stopped his kitchen work and sat down patiently beside her and demonstrated three times, with a gentle voice and a huge smile, how to tie a bow. When she succeeded he gently patted her on the shoulder in affirmation, sent her on her way to school and returned to his kitchen.

I watched Narendra, the Sports Instructor, notice a young boy sitting on one side with his head and shoulders hunched up. Narendra walked over, sat next to the boy, placed his arm around him and spent time just talking with him. The next time I saw the boy he was smiling and playing with the others.

Imagine a small queue of children waiting to have splinters removed, not because they all have splinters but because they want the band-aid and the enormous hug that goes with it! Or try to hear the Hindi singing – Bollywood and Folk, from both teachers and children, which floats beautifully in the background of daily life at Udayan. Watch the staff, volunteers and children clearing a field to plant vegetables or see all 51 children sitting silently during prayer time - at least attempting to sit silently as the inevitable fidgeting and dramatic coughing seems to occur in the smallest ones.

Volunteers from around the world come to Udayan. During my stay, we had volunteers from Taiwan, Germany, the United States, Norway, Ireland, Australia and Wales. Stays range from 3 days to 6 months or more! These volunteers offer meaningful opportunities for the children to learn about different countries and cultures. The volunteers work with the kids on different types of activities. Recently, Lisa from Germany finished a film project where the kids wrote, acted and filmed an original story – ably assisted by the teaching staff. Also during my stay, 3 volunteers from the US put together 2 different rock bands with the children. They performed at the Vatsalya Fair. It is amazing to see what can be accomplished in a short period of time!

I would love to sit across a cup of coffee and tell you stories about each of the 51 children. You would meet Aayush and Apoorv, 4-year-old identical twins. They both love singing and dancing and recently have become quite enamored with headstands. Or I could tell you about Nausheen, 15 going on 30 going on 3 going on 15. Sounds like a typical teenager, eh? She comes across as a tough girl and yet she is one of the children who had tears in her eyes as we hugged goodbye. Or you could learn about Karan. He is 12 and loves to practice English. We said the same things over and over each day. He was patient with my Hindi progress and I was patient with his English progress.

These simple examples fail to even begin to capture the magic of Udayan, the staff, and children. I wish that each of you could personally experience this wonderful place. It was

a life changing experience! I came to Udayan for a 3 month stay. Because I knew the histories of many of the children, I expected Udayan to be a place where I saw and worked with traumatized children. Instead, I found a home, in the deepest sense of the word, a place where healthy children experience the normal rigors, challenges and joys of childhood. Certainly they have experienced more trauma than any child ever should but, with the abundance of love and care shown for them by the dedicated staff, they are flourishing. They are truly “rising and moving ahead.”

Four years after - the return to Udayan!
Ana Caterina, Portugal. Dated: 27th March, 2008

There is an amazingly inspiring world just outside the city of Jaipur. It's a kind of a world between worlds, a beautiful and magical place that not too many people seem to know about. Those who have had the privilege of hearing about it, or even of being accepted into it's walls, call it Udayan.

I guess I can say I was one of the “chosen ones”: almost four years ago, Udayan's gate opened up for me and I was allowed to spend nine months in such a special place. Somebody who never had such an opportunity would certainly ask “what was it about that place that made it so special?”. And it's not that easy to explain, since words always seem to express very limited (and limiting) concepts. But I will try...

The moment I arrived in Udayan I had just left behind the world I've ever known, my comfortable and little world. Of course I was happy about it, after all it was me who had chosen to step out into the unknown. The problem is that “unknown” and “change” can become too stressful and even scary things to search for. But I had no time to feel stressed or nervous! The magical beings who lived inside Udayan's walls (around 40 smiley and playful children) welcomed me in the most warming and caring way possible and gave a new identity to feel proud about – I became a “Didi”.

When we feel happy time seems to fly away. And as much as we try to hold it and stop it from running away, we cannot. That's what happened to me, the nine months were soon over and the time came for me to go back to the “real world”. I left but I took with me the greatest gift - A heart filled with love and joy.

Again the time flew... And almost four years afterwards I found myself returning to Udayan. While I was on the way, during the pilgrimage to the place where I had once been so happy, the question kept coming to my mind: “will I find it very different nowadays?”.

And I did find it quite different! In the last four years, the children weren't the only ones growing up; Udayan itself seems to have grown with them. The number of children has increased to 54 and the premises have now more facilities, activities, staff members and even other living beings:

- a Basketball field was built in the playground;
- The gate was moved to a different location, which allowed space for a big board to be built (a board with information about Udayan's children, activities and events – useful for both visitors and the children)

- The number of staff members has increased in around 8/9 people, which means that the children have more people not only to teach and entertain them but also on whom to rely on;
- The flow of volunteers has increased immensely. This seemed to me to have been quite positive for the children not only in terms of increasing their awareness of the outside world but also in what comes to their self-esteem. When I first arrived (4 years ago), I was looked upon almost as if I was some kind of a superior divine being just because I was a foreigner. Nowadays children (and also the staff) are so used to dealing with foreign volunteers that they already see them as their equals;
- A new children's unit has been built and the units I once knew are now much more colorful;
- A water deposit has been built;
- Some of the staff has new accommodations, beautifully decorated by the children and previous volunteers;
- Among the new acquisitions there is also a Bus: children can now go for outings on their own vehicle;
- Udayan adopted a dog named Pepsi and a whole family of geese for the children to interact with (the geese family spend most of their time in a small lake, close to a wall that is a real work of art made by a previous volunteer Laura Seligman from the US);
- Last but not least: all the gardening sessions had - and are having – very pleasant results. I found that the premises are now very green, filled with plants and even big trees. This means there will be a lot of nice shades to fight for during the summer heat!!

It was inspiring to note all these changes that have come from Udayan's growth, but what was actually more impressive was to see how the children have changed. The children I once met have turned into even more beautiful beings: they seemed to have grown not only physically, they also looked more confident and proud of themselves for being who they are – the children of Udayan!

Some examples...?

I think one of the most impressive examples must be Aakash: I've seen him arriving in Udayan along with his three siblings. He was around one year old, he suffered from TB, and he was the skinniest baby I've ever seen. Nobody was sure he was going to survive. After almost four years, he is huge and it's difficult to stop him! He is one of the naughtiest small children, always running and jumping around and, as I've heard, he is also one the most intelligent and promising children from his class!

The growth of Udayan carried a lot of changes that seemed to have affected also the staff. I would dare saying that it's been the increasing number of volunteers in the last few years that has had the highest impact in their growth and learning. People like Manju, Om Prakash and even Poornima, Shanti or Pushpa seem now more confident when addressing foreigners. Both their communication skills and their knowledge of English seem to have improved (although there is still a lot of work to be done in that area, since the more volunteers arrive in Udayan, the more will be required from them in terms of communication and organization skills and even conflict management). I was delighted to see that one of the staff members that used to be a Teacher Cum Mother (Manju) is now one of the three Campus in Charge. She seemed competent and hardworking in

performing her duties, but most of all she seemed quite motivated because she could see that her work has been (and is being) recognized.

And what about the future of Udayan?

The premises will continue to accompany the children's growth as a new unit is being built and Udayan is preparing itself to welcome 15 more children. A new challenge for the future-: To increase the size of the family to 70 members (not counting on the staff) and maintaining that warm and cozy atmosphere of a family instead of an institution. And should the growth stop here? Should the number of children coming to Udayan be restricted to 70 or should it be once more increased in the future?

I guess only the future experience can give proper answers to such questions. But to me (and I'm sure this is even a more solid truth for the children) Udayan is such a special place because you can feel there is a lot of love and caring for the children, there is space for the staff to establish special bonds with the children and they are actually encouraged in doing so. It is scientifically proved that love is very important for children's development, and it mustn't be that easy to find an institution able to raise a child in a loving environment. So, in my opinion, such ability shouldn't be compromised by an overpopulation of children living in the premises.

Aditi from USA September, 2009

“..... As to my feedback, my experience was fabulous. You have founded an incredible program and I am so glad I was able to be a part of it. I liked how the children, especially the older ones, followed such a set routine and were always doing something productive. It was amazing how everyone, teachers and students alike, helped one another, taught one another, and corrected one another, selflessly and uninhibitedly. The only area I feel that could be improved upon is the structure of the primary school from the interval onwards. While there was supervision for the younger children before the interval, there was no one to keep them in check afterwards. On one occasion, we walked into the classroom to find one child snipping another one's hair with a scissor and another child who had climbed high into the metal closet and could not come down. Additionally, aside from one or two books in the primary classroom, the reading material was not age appropriate as the stories and topics were so complex. We went to a few bookstores and asked for books for 3-6 year old children, but we were unable to find any.

Other than that, I had a wonderful time with the kids at Udayan and am really looking forward to the pen pal program. In fact, I was so anxious to communicate with them that I learned to read and write Hindi during the car ride back to Dehli. I am now writing a paragraph a day in Hindi for practice and am reading 3rd grade books. As many AIFJC members are still on vacation, we will only be having our next meeting in mid-September. However, I will be sure to bring up the pen pal project at that time. In the meanwhile, I am composing a first letter to all the children, re-introducing the pen pal idea and asking those interested to send a list of their names and a little bit about themselves (a special interest they have, a short one-paragraph biography, or a picture they have drawn). Please do inform them that a letter, along with photographs capturing some of our memories together is on its way...”

Nikhil Verma, CRY, New Delhi
September 2010

“.....Thank you very much for sending me the newsletters regularly. The words and narration of every newsletter, refreshes and add to my lovely, educative and motivating memories of your institution which I gathered during my various visits to Udayan. Every visit is unforgettable. This place is always full of love, care, affection, childhood energy, smiling faces, creativity and hopes. Today itself I have returned from Jaisalmer, where I met few people from Deriya and adjoining villages, this is the place from where three children (if not mistaken they are **Satyam, Nirjala and Shivam**) of your institution belong. The villagers were sharing their experiences of meeting these three lovely children when they visited their relatives' home during recent summer vacation. People from neighboring villages came just to have a look to these children; everyone was full of praise the way these children are groomed, some of them were completely surprised and could not believe their eyes that they are the same children who used to live in their village in abject poverty, negligence and untapped inherent talent. The villagers were blessing for the magician who made it possible and I think they were absolutely right in doing so. You all at Vatsalya have really devoted your soul, heart, visionary skills and love to make it possible. I again give you congratulation for creating a model and making life of these children meaningful. During conversation with the villagers, few things struck me and prompted me to write this mail to you. I will discuss the issue with you in detail, when I get an opportunity to meet you in person at Jaipur. Till then, it is just a request; please use your model “Udayan” as an advocacy tool to influence *Children Institution Keepers* and *Policy Makers* especially in case of children who live in Children Care and Protection Homes, and children covered under Palanhaar Yojna of Rajasthan. We have full faith that you can do it and with your efforts destiny of millions of children can be rewritten...”

Delta Donohue remembers Vatsalya children, May, 2010

I Am A Child

I am Gudiya

I am Raju

I am Pinki

I am Rana

How old am I? I don't know

How old do I look?

I could be as young as 3 or as old as 18

There are no birthdays on the streets

I am a child

I am Bhuria

I am Shanno

I am Sukhram

I am Jhumki

My Mother begs at a temple, we don't have money for food

My father remarried when my Mother died, his new wife didn't like us so he threw us out

After my parents beat me, I ran away

All is I know is my parents died and suddenly I was alone

I am a child

I am Balbeer

I am Raveena

I am Keshav

I am Shabana

Run, the police are coming

I have no money to pay them

They beat my friend yesterday

I don't want them to take me away

I am a child

I am Kalu

I am Munni

I am Rahmat

I am Kamali

They step over me as I sleep

They don't see me but I see their eyes

They think I am nothing

They think I am not them

I am a child

I am a child

I am a child

I am your child.

Volunteers from University of North Carolina, March, 2011

We had a visit from a group of University of North Carolina and University of Pennsylvania alumni who were traveling through India on an alumni tour organized jointly by the universities and by Odyssey Travel (a tour company). As part of the SevaYatra mission (www.sevayatra.com) to educate travelers about India's social sector, it was suggested that they include at least one or two visits to NGOs. They were very interested in visiting and learning about Vatsalya. They spent some time in our Children's Village and when they left, they shared their thoughts with us, which absolutely delighted our children and staff! Here is what they expressed:

...Today made my day and perhaps my trip to India. To see such a positive and loving environment for children forgotten by others, bringing out the best in them, and teaching skills and acceptance, is an inspiration. Bravo to the founders and teachers! We should all be that committed to caring for the children of the world. Thank you!

....The visit to the school was wonderful – amazing to see what they have accomplished so far. I loved doing something so different on a tourist trip. It was well worth it. The only downside was we needed more time!!

....The visit to the Children's Village added an important dimension to our experience of India. We were impressed by the joyfulness of the children. Thank you, we will keep them in mind.

....Seldom have I seen love more badly needed or more freely given.

....The work of removing street children and providing them with love, security and hope is so important. We will hold you in our thoughts and prayers.

....By far, the most memorable experience of this trip!

.....A very rewarding experience and so memorable. The staff – all of them – and the children spoke excellent English and did a fine job guiding us around the campus. The children seemed happy and were very welcoming. One of them asked me to return and said, "**This is your second home.**"

....I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The philosophy behind the center entirely agrees with all my thoughts and passions on how to best serve young people – preparing them with skills for their future is the best love they could ever experience and doing it in an atmosphere of warmth and total acceptance is the perfect world.

....Visit to the children's village was very inspiring. The staff were very welcoming. Thank you for this opportunity.

....I was overwhelmed by the fervor and clarity of vision of the director. She had such a deep-seated understanding of the problems and a brilliant sense of how to solve them. It would be inspiring to be a member of her staff..."

**Kay Schwenn, German Embassy, New Delhi
January, 2011**

“Thanks for including me in your regular newsletter communication which I read with undiminished interest. After all, Vatsalya and Udayan, and all they stood for, have left me with fond and most vivid memories of my project work in Jaipur which in retrospect was the most rewarding and encouraging period of my last years of active duty as spent in India. From your communication I gather that Vatsalya is successfully continuing its project efforts for the underprivileged children, thereby raising reassurance that it was the right decision to encourage project promotion after our first encounter back in 2006. With appreciative delight I take note of your warm words and good wishes, combined with the kind welcome you are extending, for they revive my fondest memories of journeys to Jaipur and Vatsalya that keep recurring whenever I reflect on times past in India. Both my wife and I would love to take you up on your offer someday, not least to refresh the positive picture of Udayan. I wish both of you to remain successful for a long time to come, combined with my best wishes for personal health and happiness, and remain.

**Yours sincerely,
Kay Schwenn
2nd Secretary (ret)
German Embassy”**

Visitors and volunteers in May, 2011

“.....Last month one of Arjun's teachers was asking him to pinpoint one thing and or event that was life- altering for him. I was within earshot and heard him answer: **“Spending time with the children at the Vatsalya’s Udayan village put things in perspective for me. I came back having gained and learned so much from the children there”**. We do really still cherish our few days there. It is such a pity that we were never able to develop and keep open the communication channel between the children in the two continents....”

Arti Ghai, USA

“It was a pleasure for me to visit your ‘island’ of happiness and content at Achrol...”
Tarun Bansal, India

“...First of all, I have to say that Vatsalya could probably be the role model for every other home for children of their kind. The location is wonderful - away from the stressful city, an architecture and campus every child could dream of, great stuff that gives lots of love to the little ones, education and very good "entertainment" in terms of sports, arts and dance, etc. The doors which Vatsalya opens for the children are huge in comparison to where they come from. What makes it even more admirable is the fact that the whole organization is very personal and that you and your husband are spending time with the children yourselves. We enjoyed staying with the children a lot. They are all adorable and individual...” **Marie, Germany**

Victoria (Vicki Didi) Lawn, USA
March, 2010

“...I feel honored to have had the privilege of working for such a strong organization and equally as strong children. During my stay with Vatsalya, I undoubtedly learned more than I could have imagined regarding Indian culture, a committed NGO, and how to combine compassion with a perseverant attitude and mind to truly accomplish significant goals.

While working at Vatsalya, I also was blessed with meeting some extraordinary people who are gifted beyond their knowledge in areas of compassion, strength, persistence and passion. The staffs at Udayan, Kavach, Upaarjen and Targeted Intervention in Ajmer all have a unique dynamic that contributes to each project’s special needs and successes. While observing each of these projects I was able to learn from both the staff and the people it served which made my entire experience extremely vibrant. It was particularly a pleasure to learn from and work with Jaimala and Hitesh. They are both extremely dedicated to the mission of Vatsalya, and working with them gave me hope for my future aspirations of working in medicine and public health as well enthusiasm for a future visit.

While learning about the diverse ways Vatsalya serves the people of Jaipur and its surrounding areas, I was simultaneously inspired to contribute in equally diverse ways. Where Vatsalya aims to fill in gaps between the government and the people, I aimed to fill the needs in each program. At Udayan and Upaarjen, I facilitated an identity workshop for young adults and adolescents to build self-awareness and self-esteem. At Kavach and Targeted Intervention I learned many outreach strategies and how to present critical health information to the very poor general population. Lastly, I was able to participate in the Samvedna-Jagriti camp for slum children where I took the opportunity to revise the curriculum. At Vatsalya, every volunteer has a wonderful opportunity to engage their unique talents and passions while learning from some unexpected sources as well. Lastly, I cannot close this letter without a special note of gratitude for the children and staff at Udayan and the guesthouse for their open hearts and minds as they were always willing to share a part of themselves with me while being open to my new ideas too. I am so thankful for the opportunity to witness the strength of the children who have already overcome many obstacles the cruel world has placed before them. But, it was even more beautiful to witness and receive their warmth, creativity and tenderness that one might not expect after surviving their hardships. Each one of the children touched me in their own unique way and certainly left a footprint on my heart. I do hope my path in the future leads me back to Udayan and Jaipur so I have the chance to see where all of their paths are taking them.

With Love and Warmest Regards,
Victoria (Vicki Didi) Lawn, USA
March, 2010.....”

Arjun Ghai, April, 2012

“**S**orry for the delay it has been very hectic with the start of Tennis Season and junior year in full swing with AP test less than a month away. But nonetheless I am getting through and it looks like thing will clear up in the near future!

In December, I was truly amazed to see how much progress some of the Vatsalya Udayan children had made over the course of the last two years. The few days that I spent with them in 2009 had a remarkable impact on my outlook in life. I truly want to play a key part in their future and in turn have them play an integral part in mine. On my return from India, I founded an organization called **Tech2Teach** which focuses on using technology to further the learning process. Under Tech2Teach the possibilities are endless. I have a specific goal in mind and I am determined to reach and exceed it ultimately creating a program that will expose children to the infinite amount of information available to us. First and foremost there obviously needs to be equipment available to them. When we met you in December you were discussing the electricity wiring options and all the external paraphernalia needed to allow the projector to be operational. Has the wiring been completed? We were also talking about an inverter or a backup battery for the computer and projector. Were you able to buy that yet? Please do not hesitate to tell me what is lacking and how I can help. Under Tech2Teach I have been doing 3-4 hours/week of private tutoring for kids. All the money I earn tutoring kids is funding Tech2Teach to directly or indirectly benefit the education of the kids in Vatsalya.

As you already know, there are innumerable programs/videos available in Math, English, Science etc., but I was hoping to establish a program over Skype for general knowledge/education. Obviously we would have to work out the logistics of it but I would really be interested in preparing a weekly presentation on varying topics be it a trending news story; or be it a particular holiday; or be it taking a virtual tour of a foreign country or an interesting city. I feel that with all the technology we have access to, the possibilities are endless and I want to take advantage of that. Let me know your thoughts, comments and/or suggestions on such a program. I strongly believe that such a program would go a long way in giving a world perspective to the kids.

Also if I can help in any way as far as the school goes with providing lesson plans, workbooks, or anything of that nature, please let me know. I am more than willing to help in that aspect. I look forward to hearing from you and together I know we can make a difference.

Thanks, Arjun Ghai”

World Challenge Expedition teams, UK and Australia

April, 2012

Vatsalya Udayan has been an incredibly eye opening experience. The way that the staff at Vatsalya rises to the challenge and keeps the children happy and occupied is simply incredible. The children themselves are so happy and positive despite the often dark histories they share. It is simply so warming to realize the depth and compassion that people have who care for them. The love is overwhelming and truly awe inspiring. Vatsalya is an amazing organization. The level and amount of work has been astounding. The kids were happy, there is always enough food to eat, and the accommodation was clean and comfortable. I will leave here a changed man being exposed to such acts of kindness and grace of heart...**Josh Sim**”

“Coming to Vatsalya has been an absolutely amazing, once in a life time experience. I have learnt so much about happiness, gratitude and family. This place is filled with love, shown through the food, activities and beautiful prayers...**Naomi Bagga**”

“I have really enjoyed my stay at Vatsalya. Sport was the most fun ever – I don’t think I have ever laughed so hard or so long, even though we were thrashed every time. While I did miss the convenience of a shower, using warm water and a bucket was perfectly fine. I had the best time ever here, so thank you very much...**Jessica Riese**”

“An absolutely amazing and life changing experience, one which I will never forget!! The children were an absolute pleasure to meet, play with and talk to. Every single one was kind, many with a good sense of humour...**Joshua Berymook**”

“I can’t think of a better place for a child to grow up....**Lauren**”

“My time at Vatsalya was filled with fun, laughter and challenges. It was very nice of you to allow us nearly full reign to do what we wanted to in the Nursery. It allowed us to be creative and get really motivated to complete our work...**Gemma Poole**”

“From the moment we arrived, I felt like we were part of a family. I also found it amazing at how self-sufficient it is here with your solar and gas systems. The values the children are taught are beautiful....**Zoey Jackson**”

“We loved the sports time, from 4 – 6 pm, playing with everyone. It was a good combination of getting to know the children, spending time painting, and having time to relax over chai tea. Thank you very much for all the warmth, laughter and love. I felt a real sense of belonging here at Vatsalya and will take that sense of belonging away with me... **Fliiss**”

“Vatsalya is a miracle unto itself in India. It helps people in a real and tangible way across many regions. The warmth with which we were welcomed created an aura of safety for us a long way from home.” (**There was no name with this note**)

“Vatsalya is a beautiful place. I feel loved, nourished and respected. Vatsalya has given me a heartening adventure into India’s culture and people. All elements of infrastructure and activity express the compassion and enthusiasm of voluntary work here. I am enriched to be in this cornucopia of family love and kindness...**Amanda Dwight**”

“It was a great experience and has helped to develop an awareness of our place in the world and how we can help others...**Rod Harris**”

“My stay here has been educational, emotional, fun, eye opening and positive...**Naomi McKay**”

“Along with an amazing self-discovery journey, we’ve learned and gained new perspectives on many aspects of life at Vatsalya. We have thoroughly enjoyed being part of such a worthwhile organization. **Simran Hingorani and Milly Hanigan**”

**From the Files of Friends
January, 2012**

“...I had prepared myself that since some of them were orphans they would be sad and unhappy and would have lot of problems. But this was not the fact when I met them in Udayan. The children are full of joy and happiness. They are open-minded and very generous. The atmosphere in Udayan is very nice and kind of healing. The pure nature surrounding the beautiful buildings and the children’s joy is wonderful to observe. It is nearly impossible not to find the peace within yourself, when you are here. Sometimes in the evening when I watched the spectacular sunset and heard the children’s laughter while they were playing, I thought this is true the meaning of life...! It is amazing that you have created this fantastic place. Some of the things I value the most are your endeavours to find the best solution for the children, your efforts to give these children a good life (e.g. the opportunity for a practical education), your frankness regarding development and an open mind for a different view. **Marie Hejlskov, Denmark**

“.....I believe this place on earth, is a micro-wonder. This is a place to be loved and cherished.”-
Hugo de Schrijver, Belgium

“...It was wonderful getting to know the staff and children at Udayan. The children are very sweet and welcomed me without question; they continually surprised me with their intelligence and artistic skills. I will treasure my memories of my time there. I hope I can visit again in the future....”- **Jennifer Koester, USA**

Talking of Udayan, I would also like to share with you some of the thoughts and aspirations of our growing children. We presented awards to the outstanding performers for the year 2010-11 and this is what some of them had to say about the prizes they won:

Anmol (Star of Udayan)...”I am humbled by this award and am grateful but I think I really do not deserve it. Last time I got this award, I was simply excited to receive it and never thought whether or not I actually deserved it. But it seems my values make me question these things now. Having received it, I will do more to come up to the expectations of my elders and my own. I dream of becoming an honest, able and hardworking administrator of Udayan and helping everyone in this noble work...”

Devashish (Rising Star of Udayan) ...”I think I am given this award because I have worked hard to leave behind my past, developed a positive attitude towards life and now I stand right next to others who were much ahead of me 3-4 years ago. I am obedient, respect my elders and have been able to control my anger considerably. When I complete my studies, I want to be a good teacher and help little children learn everything about the world. I am happy to get this award, but please don’t mind if I say I did not need it. I have my goal in front of me and to be able to pursue it is enough for me ...”

Mukesh (Academic Star of Udayan) ...”I am happy to get this award. Some years back, when I was not listed for any award, I was very heartbroken. I was angry with myself and vowed to change it. Awards are important for me; they encourage and inspire me...” Mukesh, who is in 12th Grade and is preparing for the entrance exam of the government administrative services, questioned the system of deciding awards in Udayan! He said there was not a good mechanism to select good performers. Coming from a person like Mukesh, no one challenged his question. And so there was an instant decision to appoint an “Awards Committee” to undertake the responsibility in future.

Though it sounds like a bureaucratic management strategy to bypass troubled areas, you can trust our children to get the best out of it...:)

A childhood story as recounted by a seven year old at Vatsalya Udayan April, 2013

Last evening, I had this little one sitting by me on my Gujarati swing outside my room in Udayan. He was talking to me in his child-like speech using “t” for “d; “r” for “k” and all possible misplaced combinations. He always speaks very sweetly and repeats as many times as you wish, or until he is sure that you have understood what he wants to say. His innocence and sweetness wins every heart in Udayan and this last evening’s conversation with him generated in me a great respect and admiration for this brave little soul. It’s relevant to mention here that he is just 7 at present and has been with us for three years. That means, he is narrating many things that happened when he was about four years old!

Let us call him “Sundar”. Here is how our conversation developed.

Me: When did you last have your head massage?

Sundar: Many days ago, when it was winter.

Me: Do you want me to give you a head massage now?

Sundar: Yes! Where’s the oil? (I tell him.) I’ll go and get it. (He jumps off the swing, goes into the room, finds it and brings it to me.) Which oil is this?

Me: Amla.

Sundar: Humm..., smells nice. In my house we had that kind of oil.

Me: Your house? Tell me about it.

Sundar: What should I tell you about it?

Me: Everything, whatever you wish: how big it was, how many rooms there were, who were all the people who lived in it, what you ate, how you slept....whatever you can tell me. Let’s just talk about our house, OK?

Sundar: It was made of stones (indicates with hand to show it was a 2-foot high wall) and wooden poles holding a piece of plastic as a roof....there was a cot, its leg was broken so we had bricks fixed under it...it shook a lot when we slept on it (laughs).

Me: Who slept on it?

Sundar: Me, Bhaiya and ‘T’ (the other brother who also lives in Udayan)

Me: And your Mummy and Papa?

Sundar: Mummy went up there (pointing a finger to sky).

Me: Do you remember her? What was her name?

Sundar: She was very sick. I don’t know her name. Then one day she slept in the night and in the morning when we woke her up, she didn’t get up. Then some people came and put her on a piece of wood, then put a white sheet on her, then put lots of flowers on her, then four people lifted her on their shoulders and they took her away. They were saying ‘*Ram name satt hai, satt bolo gatt hai*’ (“the only truth is God, be truthful and get Nirwana” – a spiritual chanting when Hindus take their dead for burning).

Me: Did you cry?

Sundar: No.

Me: What were you doing when they were taking her away?

Sundar: Papa gave me biscuits and chewing gum.

Me: Do you like chewing gum?

Sundar: Yes. You bring me some when it’s my birthday, ok?

Me: I’ll bring you something else, not chewing gum.

Sundar: Why?

Me: It’s not nutritious or healthy. I’ll bring something nice.

Sundar: You promised that you would bring sweets for me but you haven’t.

Me: When did I say that?

Sundar: That day when you were sitting in the garden, when you were wearing a yellow Saree and you were talking to the children and you said you would bring what we wanted. But you haven't. You said you would bring things but you haven't! Why haven't you?

Me: (knowing I am cornered and trying to make a genuine-sounding excuse): Well, I want to but sometimes I just don't have enough money

Sundar: Why? You can just sell iron and plastic and bottles and you can get money. Then you can buy all sorts of things for us.

Me: Iron, plastic, bottles??? Who told you that you can sell these things to get money? And where do you think I'll get iron, plastic and bottles?

Sundar: Well, we did that. We picked up those things from here and there and Papa sold them and then bought stuff for us.

Me: Stuff means food?

Sundar: No, not food. He brought stuff like biscuits and chewing gum etc.

Me: Why he did not bring flour and rice and potato etc. so that you could eat chapattis and sabji?

Sundar: There was no stove or plates or pans. We only had a bottle for water that we filled from a tap across the street.

Me: But here you get chapattis and sabji and daal. Do you like that? Or do you want biscuits and chewing gum?

Sundar: I love chapattis and daal and rice and sabji and pav-bhaji and halwa and milk and...and...What do you like?

Me: I like laddoo... rasmalai... mishrimava...raj bhog...

Sundar: What is raj bhog? Bring it for us next time.

Me: Ok, I will.

Sundar: If you don't have money, you can sell iron lying around in Udayan.

Me: No, we don't need to do that. We can get money other ways.

Sundar: Ok, yes, I know. You can teach, you can drive, you can work in the office. Right?

Me: Yes, that's right. (I was reminded of an earlier conversation with little Ziya who told me I could buy money from a shop if I ran out of cash. When I asked where I should get money to BUY money, her answer still was "from a shop!")

Sundar: When I am big, I want to work and earn and get married.

Me: Who told you that you have to get married?

Sundar: Papa. He said: grow big, work hard, build a house for yourself and get married.

Me: Who do you want to get married with?

Sundar: Anmol Didi.

Me: Why Anmol Didi?

Sundar: She is nice and she takes care of me. When someone harasses me, she scolds them.

Me: Who harasses you?

Sundar: Sanjay Bhaiya, Rohit Bhaiya, Swapnil Bhaiya, Sohail Bhaiya, Robin Bhaiya. That's all.

Me: What do they do?

Sundar: When I am walking, they suddenly slap me on the back and disappear. When I catch them, I tell Anmol Didi. She scolds them and they say "sorry".

Me: Do they really harass you or try to have fun with you? Are they bad Bhaiyas?

Sundar: (with a coy smile): they laugh and tickle me! They also give me their share of milk when I ask.

Me: What do you want to be when you are a big man?

Sundar: I don't know. When you were my age, did you know what you wanted to become?

Me: (feeling completely foolish): no, I didn't.

Sundar: Where is your mother?

Me: Up there.

Sundar: Do you miss her?

Me: Sometimes. Do you like it here?

Sundar: Yes, very much. When we came here, Babu Lal Sir brought us in the jeep and I saw it was very beautiful here and there were trees and pigeons and geese and nice rooms and a bed. And Manju Didi gave us new clothes and Shanti Aunty bathed me and Prasanna Didi took me to the kitchen and fed me. It's very nice; I want to live here always.

By this time, I was finished with his head massage and hand massage and was going to ask him to go to sleep. But before I could say it, he had rolled his pants up and put his feet in my lap, ordering: "Now my legs!"

It is a blessing to be able to have all these children here with us. They bring such joy and happiness and peace in the lives of those who are fortunate enough to be with them, around them. And I am so grateful to YOU, dear friend, who are reading this note, for helping us in our endeavors!