



World's Children

A Day in the Life:

What's it Like in an Orphanage?

What would you expect to find if you could visit a World's Children orphanage? If you buy the negative stereotype, you might be imagining a gloomy building filled with solemn children. But are all orphanages really sad places? You might be surprised at just how cheerful they are.

Though many children arrive abandoned, rejected, or grieving, orphanages can become vibrant, happy places—once children adjust and settle into their new home. But it takes time, patience and a lot of love.

As you can imagine, some children may be devastated from the loss of a parent when they first arrive and are slow to overcome their grief. Other children might arrive with serious behavior issues—bad habits that helped them survive as beggars or neglected children. Most of the children never had a good role model at home and may have some very bad habits that the orphanage staff must address.

If you've raised children of your own, you know how hard it can be to make sure a child or two stays safe and happy. It's even more challenging to raise a healthy young person with strong morals, a good work ethic, and an educated mind.

Imagine having that responsibility as an orphanage administrator for 30, 60, or 100 children—all looking to you for guidance and support every day. Somehow these diligent caretakers manage to provide an environment where the children can grow, heal, and just be kids.

Curious what life is like behind the orphanage door? We've put together this quick tour to introduce you to orphanage life. From staying healthy to study time, you'll meet children at play and their hardworking administrators who make sure the orphanages are really happy homes.



Girls from one of our orphanages enjoying a field trip

Who Runs an Orphanage? Meet the Caretakers



Uttam Kumar, the administrator of Balavikasita Orphanage, once told us that he often must keep an eye on new boys when they first arrive to be sure they don't steal the metal handrails in the stairwells. Many of these boys had survived on the streets by finding or stealing metal which they sold to recycling companies (photo on left). Uttam said they would quietly try to unscrew the railings with the idea they could later sell them if their stay in the orphanage did not work out. Look at those boys today (photo on the right). It's administrators like Uttam who help scared and sad children become part of a new family.



The faces of these administrators reveal the kindness and love they have for the children.



The nuns who operate Bethel Orphanage (above) are very sweet and light-hearted. During a field visit to India, David (our Executive Director) was entertained one night by the children with some energetic and unstructured dancing. Suddenly, to his surprise, all the nuns jumped to their feet and joined the children in their exuberant dance. He took a photo of those dancing nuns and it is on the wall of our office. It makes us smile every time we look at it. This is the kind of community an orphanage can be.

Staying Clean and Healthy in an Orphanage



At a school for street children where David taught for a time, the first lessons most children had to learn upon arriving were not academic, but basic sanitation. They had to be taught how and why to brush their teeth, wash their hands after using the toilet, and not to gorge themselves at mealtime because

now they would always have enough to eat at every meal.



Modesty is very important in India, even for children. Because bathing is often a public event, clothing generally stays on during washing. These kids are getting scrubbed by the nuns at their bathing tank funded by World's Children donors.



In South India it is warm enough to bathe out of a water tank. But further north they must heat the water for their baths over a wood fire, sometimes for a hundred or more kids. World's Children is slowly funding solar hot water heaters (above right) in those orphanages.



Every child has a plastic bucket for washing their clothes. At the homes for children living with HIV we are helping to install washing machines, as sanitation is so important for children with compromised immune systems.



(Left) The Bridge of Hope orphanage in Ethiopia has a practice barber shop where bad haircuts are tolerated as the older boys learn the trade. In most India orphanages, a local barber comes to the home periodically to give haircuts to all the boys. Older girls usually grow their hair long and braid it each day before school.



What's for Dinner? Food and Drink in the Orphanages



Girls are eating from banana leaf plates (right).

At Swadhar Home, the girls sew leaves together to make plates to sell. (below)



Public drinking taps in India typically have one metal cup that everybody uses. But Indian people have devised a clever way to drink out of one cup without spreading germs. The cup is held just above the mouth and a stream of water is poured between the lips without touching the cup. Foreigners generally get a face full of water and a lot of laughs when they try it. These Balavikasita Orphanage girls are trying out their new water cooler which is attached to a water filter (above).



Like any family, kids in the orphanages have their daily chores, including helping prepare and serve dinner for their family of 50!



Bananas, mangoes, papayas and coconuts are widely available in India. These boys are excited for a snack! India was famous for its spices as far back as 5,000 years ago. These girls (right) are scraping cinnamon twigs to flavor their evening meal. Other common Indian spices include cardamom, ginger, black pepper, turmeric, nutmeg and chili pepper.



At the Bridge of Hope Children's Village in Ethiopia, the children live in eight apartments, four for boys and four for girls. The children eat meals in their own apartments so they feel more homelike. Ethiopia was once briefly colonized by Italy, which may explain these boys' fondness for spaghetti.

Goodnight, and Sleep Tight!



We're slowly changing this picture (left) by funding beds and mattresses (right). The thin, straw mats they sleep on are uncomfortable. Worse, there is no way to hang a mosquito net, putting the children at risk for malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases.



Every orphanage in India has what is called a "box room" or "trunk room" where each child has a metal trunk or sometimes a suitcase to store all their belongings. This is where the children keep their most treasured items including photos, cards and letters from their sponsors (left).



The boys at Balavikasita Orphanage are trying out their new bunk beds for the first time. The metal frames above the top bunks help administrators to hang mosquito nets over the beds. Some homes now have screens on the windows and some use ceiling fans to help keep the mosquitoes away.

Teach the Children Well



The Indian government now requires that all schools have desks for the students. Previously students just sat cross-legged on the floor. World's Children donors paid for these new desks.



We sometimes find children's letters to their sponsors are identical to other letters. The photo above shows why.



Some children arrive at the orphanages without ever attending school. Some are able to catch up, but others must rely on learning some vocational skill in order to survive as an adult. These girls at Swadhar Children's Home are learning to sew with treadle sewing machines.



A few homes have a study room where the children can do their homework. These girls are enjoying some of the new story books provided by World's Children donors.

The girls at Sneha Sadan excel in school and one reason is because they have access to newspapers and recreational books to read (below).



In homes that have no designated study area children do homework on their beds. (above)



On a nice day classes are sometimes held outside at the Nithya Sahaya Matha hostel and school.

School's Out! Time for Fun!



Kids in India love to play kabbadi and kho-kho. These girls are playing kabbadi, which is a bit like the American game "Red rover, red rover, send Lakshmi right over."



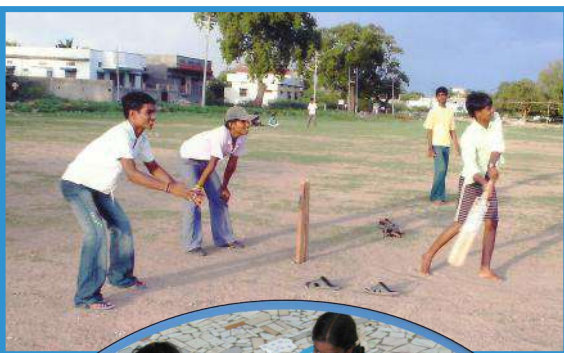
Most orphanages have adequate outdoor play areas but little playground equipment. This is the playground at Sr. Seline's Memorial Home for Children.
(above)



Every Indian girl (and most boys) love to dance. Ancient classical dances are very popular especially among the girls. This is one such dance that requires the dancer to balance a heavy clay headdress on their head while making intricate dance moves.



Badminton was invented in India and is quite popular with children and adults alike. Whenever we visit the orphanages we make sure they have a badminton set, cricket bat and balls, a carom board, and jump ropes.



The girls at the Quiche Indian Mission in Guatemala are primarily Mayan Indians. When they aren't playing basketball, they enjoy playing the marimbas and making music during their free time.

Celebrations and Special Occasions in the Homes



Any time popsicles are provided it becomes a special occasion.



Whenever we can, we like to give funds for field trips. This girl from Fatima Home is clearly enjoying her trip to the ocean.



Each month, every orphanage has a birthday party for all the children who had birthdays during that month, whether they are sponsored or not.



The children at Bridge of Hope in Ethiopia have their own circus each year where they perform gymnastic tricks they've practiced.



Rangoli is a geometrical folk art decoration that is created by women and girls during holidays all over India and is thought to bring good luck. Patterns are made in living rooms and especially in front of the entrance to one's house using colored rice flour, white flour, colored sand or flower petals. These girls are making a rangoli design in front of their hostel just prior to a holiday event.



Thanks to you, Christmas is a very happy time at the orphanages.

Although the travel was hard, it was a blessing for me to meet the children of the orphanage. I expected an orphanage to be a sad place, but it was, in fact, one of the happiest places I've ever been! I found myself wanting to be a part of such a good thing so I decided to sponsor two of the children.

—Randy, sponsor who visited an orphanage in India