



PRASANNA JYOTHI UPDATE 11/09

Site visit & funds disbursal

PJ SITE VISIT 10/31/09

by Shriya Ravikumar

- I visited Prasanna Jyothi (PJ) on 10/31/09 with my parents. On the evening that we went, tar was being laid on the roads leading to PJ and we were not able to drive the car all the way to the orphanage and had to walk half the distance. Other than this exception, PJ seemed to be located in a relatively nice, clean, and accessible neighborhood.

Welcome

- As we walked down to PJ, all the little children were standing outside waiting for us, which was a heartwarming sight to see. The little kids, Sundari Mami, and two of the older girls who had graduated from PJ welcomed my family. The younger children looked happy and were very playful, constantly teasing and talking to each other the entire time we were there. They paid close attention to any instructions Mami had for them, including assembling together in the hall and performing for us. The children sang a few bhajans for us and danced to a song on Krishna. I was very impressed by their unity and lack of hesitance in performing these. It was the first sign of the level of confidence they possessed. Mami has been teaching them these songs and dances, but expressed that it has been a little harder to do so with age.

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Facilities

- One of the older girls, who is currently pursuing her nursing degree but still resides at PJ, took me on a tour of the facilities. My first thought was that the home was very well kept and clean and there was sufficient room for the 22 children to sleep, play, and store their belongings in the 3-storey building. There is also currently a computer room with 2 desktop computers that were donated to the orphanage. The older girl told me that she is the only one who uses the computers right now for her schoolwork and while the younger kids have been taught to open MS applications, they rarely use them as there is currently little need for it. Additionally, Mami does not want them to get into the habit of wasting time on the computer and Internet.
- The facilities also have a guest room for volunteers and such who visit the site and would like to stay overnight. The site selected to build the school is located adjacent to PJ. The plot is still open and Mami is waiting on governmental approval, and getting the appropriate funding before commencing construction.





Kitchen



Construction of new school @ PJ

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Interaction & Impressions

- During my tour, I asked the older girl about her experience at PJ and she was able to very clearly express to me in English how much she enjoys herself there, the family-like atmosphere, and her career goals around pursuing a nursing degree which was notable. I also asked her if she was able to express any problems and she said she could to Mami when needed.
- It was relatively harder for me to communicate with the younger children, as they are still not well versed in English. They are able to communicate well with Sundari Mami and the caretakers though. I noticed that the younger children were also attentive to the things that some of the older children said and there was an older-younger sister relationship.
- On our way home, Mami volunteered to take us back on PJ's recently purchased school van. During our walk to the van, I was able to have extended interactions with another one of PJ's graduates who now works for IBM and lives on her own. I was amazed by her level on confidence in interacting with us and in talking about her job and career goals for the next few years. She comes to PJ almost every Sunday to teach and play with the children, and help out in general.

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School Van

- The van is a slightly different story. It was highly uncomfortable and the engine kept stopping and had to be re-started several times. The inside of the van had makeshift benches for the children to sit on, which did not appear very safe. Mami mentioned that this issue does not occur very often, but I was not very confident of that. My parents expressed the same feeling later.
- The van typically makes 2 trips in the morning and afternoon to drop and pick the children up from school. It might be worth considering channeling any excess funds towards repairing that van or getting a new one, depending on how convinced Mami might be of that.

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Conclusion

- Overall, it was a very enjoyable visit. The children seemed very happy and had a very close relationship with Mami. All 22 of the children but one are currently sponsored. Other than that, Mami did not have any further requests for funding for the moment.
- Any anticipated additional requirements will probably be for when the new school construction begins.
- I also talked to Mami about one of our volunteers in Bangalore wanting to help out and she mentioned that a good position would be as a tutor for the younger children. They currently have one volunteer for this position and one paid teacher.

