

## The Uses for US\$1

The children came in groups of tens, twenties, thirties, forties and fifties. They came on foot on the hard packed potholed dirt roads, the older ones, ages eight or nine, holding the hands of the younger ones. Many of them walked barefoot the several kilometers from the eleven villages around Nandi Hills, Bangalore rural district, India to the HH Sai Maa Health Centre, as they owned no shoes. There are no buses nor could they have afforded to take one. They came with their teachers, smiling and eager to get some needed medicine and vitamins and to learn about health and hygiene.



The children streamed in until the brick and cement hall was packed with over a thousand thin small bodies, all sitting quietly on the cool cement floor, wide eyed in anticipation of what we may share with them. Tears welled up in my eyes as I looked at the sea of expectant, upturned little faces. I could feel their hope and trust along with their unquestioning acceptance of what is. Turning to my colleagues, I can see that they too are overwhelmed. We are awed by the magnitude of the challenge and encouraged by the potential we have to make a difference in so many young lives.

We have come, a collaboration of four organizations, Us Foundation [www.usfoundation.org](http://www.usfoundation.org), Airline Ambassadors International [www.airlineamb.org](http://www.airlineamb.org), Humanity in Unity [www.humanityinunity.org](http://www.humanityinunity.org) and Vitamin Angels Alliance [www.vitaminangels.org](http://www.vitaminangels.org) to provide anti-parasitic medicine and vitamins for 25,000 children. I, as the representative of Us Foundation, the lead organization in this project, am responsible for organizing the program. Quickly I composed myself to share with them the parasite related health issues and the hygiene steps necessary to prevent re-infection. Working with the local team from Sai Maa Health

Centre, we handed out the local language hygiene and nutrition picture flyers so that the children and teachers can take the information to their villages.



This is why we are here, to avert the loss of the next generation; for a mere US\$1 we can ward off the major childhood diseases and blindness for one child. With little access to clean water and no organized sewage system in the Nandi Hills rural area; the probability of the children being infected with parasites is almost 100%. We brought anti-parasitic medicine to eliminate the parasites and multi-vitamins to support their health. The vitamins can prevent the children from illnesses that we usually only read about in the western world, rickets, scurvy, and most debilitating of all, blindness from a lack of vitamin A and other nutrients. With the medicine and vitamins the children have an opportunity to grow into healthy functioning youths.

Speaking through a translator to the children and teachers, I am amazed by their attention and focus. With a thousand children



jammed crossed legged on the hall floor, bony knees pushed up into the back of the child in front for over an hour, there was not a single disagreement. And they were attentive and interested. What they lacked in material wealth they had in a maturity and awareness that I have rarely seen in people of any age much less young children.

The distribution of the anti-parasitic medicine began. The volunteers sat in a row to dispense to the children who filed by. We made sure that they chewed and swallowed the citrus flavored tablet before we thanked them and sent them on. Two doctors worked with their teachers to get the children's health history to track their health progress. The line moved quickly, heartwarming and heartbreaking memories burned into my heart as I handed out the medicine. The children wore their threadbare school uniforms or their best clothes if they couldn't afford one for the occasion. Their hair, neatly combed for the boys, and braided with ribbons or flowers for the girls. Big brown eyes took up most of the thin sweet faces, watchful and shyly smiling or sober past their age.

Then the big event: lunch! We dished out the food to the children in long rows in the hall; again the calmness and congeniality impressed all of us volunteers. Serenely waiting for their food the children sat still, no fidgeting or rambunctious activities and they ate quietly and in such good behavior that it would impress Ms. Manners.

We closed the event with songs and chants, we laughed till we cried and then too soon it was time for the children to walk back to their villages. We gave the multi-vitamins supplies to the teachers to dispense with the children's school lunches along with extra anti-parasitic medicine for their village.



The next few days were spent introducing the anti-parasitic medicine, vitamin and health education program to parents and other villagers in the rural community. We handed out hygiene kits, health and nutrition flyers and lots of goodwill, which we got back manifold. The human connections dissolved verbal languages and customs; we were bonded with smiles and spirit.

From now on November 14<sup>th</sup>, International Children's Day will have even more meaning as that was the day we launched our program. Starting January 2007 we have monthly missions scheduled to deliver more aid and to continue the health and nutrition education to improve and maintain the children's health. We have started with 25,000 children in this area and there are so many more we can help. At US\$1 per child, the cost of a Starbucks

coffee drink can save four or five children. What a wonderful opportunity we have to make a dramatic change in so many people's lives for so little!

If you are interested in participating in a future mission, please log in [www.airlineamb.org](http://www.airlineamb.org) and for tax deductible donations to this program, please send your donation to the India children's project at:

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