



limited resources. Right now, with us, it is just him and the children. You can learn more about this place and see more of it at the [Sri Arunodayam website](#).

First we visit the younger group of boys and girls. Their enthusiasm and sweetness fill the room. They are happy with the small bag of toys we have brought and pass them around smiling. There is no fighting over them. For the one girl who cannot move to the toy bag, two other children bring toys to her. We play, read stories, count and sort pretend coins. These children are kind and are happy to have fun.



A big smile at Sri Arunodayam



Reaching Out



Reading with the Children



Smiling Girl

After a while we head upstairs to the nursery where several babies lay in cribs. Iyyappan explains in great detail the stories of these babies, gesturing and talking to them throughout. Soon we start talking to the babies in tones uncertain but meant to be comforting, and some of us hold some of the babies. They are tiny, tiny for babies. Some lie still with feeding tubes. For light and air there are two open-air windows and a doorway. Given the limited resources, the setup for these infants and the care maintained for them is remarkable. It is a tribute to the good people who work here, and Iyyappan continually expresses his gratitude for the people at the orphanage. As he is talking I look at the woman clearly in charge of the nursery, arms folded, her role as protector of these children clear. After all, who else has done what she has for these babies? We head back downstairs for a group photo with some of the boys and girls, with the plan to drive to the home where the older boys live. We will not have time on this trip to visit the older girls.



Group Photo!

Sri Arunodayam operates on private funding which you can learn more about [here](#). Two major supporters of this wonderful organization are the [Global Fund for Children](#) and the [Global Giving Foundation](#). If you are looking for a charity whose donations will truly be put toward the greater good, these two are excellent institutions supporting this incredibly worthy cause here in Chennai. From everything we saw Sri Arunodayam is well run, is certainly a lean organization, and

every resource, every effort, every person, is devoted to improving the quality of life for these children. Maybe the measure of success is the smile we saw on so many children's faces, and by that measure Iyyappan and his team are doing a stellar job.

We go to the space for the older boys. These boys range in age from 10 to 18. We go into a classroom where some of the children are using beans and work boards for counting exercises, others engaged in different work like sorting or stringing beads.

It is unclear whether the instructor shares her childrens' excitement for the balls and toys that have now taken over the room. Some boys continue their work only to have an errant ball scatter the beans, but with a little help they keep at it. These kids are full of life, we are playing catch, things are active.



Boy in the Classroom



Smiles in the Classroom



Class Work



Sorting

Later in the visit we go to a room where the kids are all lying down on mattresses, most of them awake. We left a room filled with energy and movement and now are in a still, quiet place. These children are very small, they look closer in age to the 5 to 7 year olds we met earlier but they are older, and they have difficulty with simple movements. A boy who looks 6 years old is actually 18. This room reminds us that even in the midst of the wonderful welcomes and excitement we have been greeted with, very serious physical challenges confront many of these children. Too many of them do not make it to adulthood. But some, Iyyappan points out, are borderline. He tells us that these boys lying on the floor more than anything else simply need someone to talk to them, someone to touch them. Again we try to take his lead, touching and talking to these children. Even though they do not speak to us, many respond with smiles, hand and leg movement, and even a little bit of laughter. The interaction is amazingly gratifying. A breeze blows in through an open window, those of us who can stand see a pretty lake in the near distance. Time passes quickly in this room.



View Outside

We meet at the stairway and one of us raises the topic of adoption. Adoption by foreigners is a long process in India but Iyyappan believes it could be expedited for these “special children.” He tells a story of a girl with only borderline challenges twice being adopted – only to be returned to the orphanage. Being in this home is not the solution, it should be temporary, being in a home with a family is what these children need, he tells us, and his smile breaks a little bit. This is the only time in our visit when there is a hint of pain in Iyyappan’s words. He again explains this idea that suddenly seems so self-evident, so obvious – everyone including these abandoned children deserves to be talked to, to be touched, to be shown human compassion. That is what Iyyappan has created with this place.

Earlier during the visit Iyyappan explained the name Sri Arunodayam with a smile – with every child, a new life, a new dawn. Our visit was short, he and his team live these words every day. In addition to a home, food, shelter, activities, they give these children smiles. All across the world there are heroes making the world a better place, and today we had the good fortune of meeting some of them.



Iyyappan Subramaniyan