



SUCCESS STORY

Resources Focus on Children with AIDS

A health organization supports AIDS-affected children who have nowhere else to turn



Photo: USAID/Virginia Foley

Dr. P Manorama, founder of Chennai's Community Health Education Society, works with AIDS-affected children at the CHES orphanage.

"The stigma is the challenge," says Dr. Manorama.

An alarming 90 percent of the 5.1 million people in India with HIV/AIDS don't know about their status until a crisis occurs. So when a parent dies unexpectedly or a newborn becomes ill, HIV/AIDS is often discovered to be the cause. After that, the community frequently becomes frightened and shuns the family. Relatives will not take them in. Schools reject surviving children.

Inspired by two little girls who had AIDS but nowhere to turn, Dr. P. Manorama created Chennai's Community Health Education Society (CHES), an organization that finds resources to house, educate and nurture shunned children. Supported by USAID, CHES operates five family resource centers where people learn how to care for stricken families and where myths and misinformation about HIV/AIDS are corrected to reduce fear and slow the spread of the disease. A separate CHES shelter houses and educates 32 AIDS-affected children who have nowhere to live and no family to turn to.

CHES workers seem to be everywhere: Murugan, a resident of the CHES orphanage, won a watch for being the top student at his school — one of the few that accepts children affected by HIV/AIDS, thanks to interventions by CHES. At a CHES community resource center, two adolescent peer counselors practice for a street performance about HIV/AIDS while a community educator meets with a self-help group.

Dr. Manorama's desire to help two little girls continues to have a ripple effect, each day helping more and more people affected by HIV/AIDS live with dignity and respect.