



FIRST COMBINATION NIGHT SHELTER – VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CENTER FOR STREET CHILDREN TO OPEN IN VIJAYAWADA

-- Vasavya Mahila Mandali New Shelter Will House Up To 150 Older Boys Nightly --

VIJAYAWADA, India, July 11, 2007 — Come 11 July 2007, Vijayawada Street children who are over the age of 14 will now have a safe place to stay at night for the first time at Kanuru Village, Vijayawada. Vasavya Mahila Mandali (VMM), with the support of Abbott Fund and the local community, today dedicated the Saraswathi Gora Youth Center, which will be used by night as shelter and by day for vocational training and counseling. Saraswathi Gora started VMM in 1969 along with several of her family members and other like-minded women to help children, women and families in need. Saraswathi Gora died on August 19, 2006.

“There are only four shelters in this region, and all other shelters have focused on younger children, leaving adolescents with nowhere to turn,” said Chennupati Vidya, President of VMM. “These children are at very high risk of becoming victims of violence, sexual predators and diseases, such as HIV. This shelter will not only provide the children with a place to sleep, but help them learn a trade so they will be able to better take care of themselves.”

It is estimated that up to 60,000 children are homeless and currently living on the streets of Vijayawada. The new shelter will provide sleeping space for 150 children each night on mats or bunk beds. The ground floor will be used for offices, meeting rooms, a library, counseling rooms and vocational training.

-more-

“VMM has long record of doing outstanding work for the most vulnerable women and children and we are very pleased to be partnering with them again on this new project,” said Reeta Roy, Divisional Vice President of Global Citizenship and Policy, Abbott. Abbott Fund has provided care and support for more than 200,000 children and families affected by HIV/AIDS in India since 2001, and have committed \$153,000 to build and maintain the new shelter.

A unique aspect of the new center is that the children who will utilize the shelter have been an integral part in the decision-making processes for all aspects of its use. “We all felt very strongly that if this is going to be our home, we want to show we are proud to live here and that we are members of the community too,” said Prabhakar who would be staying at the shelter. The group decided that each child would pay INR2 per day or 50 per month to sleep on mats, or INR5 per day or 100 monthly to utilize bunk beds.

Children, who stay at the shelter will be able to take and use lockers, bathe and wash their clothes. They can also take advantage of vocational training and counseling, literacy and life skills classes and fine arts skills development. Most importantly, they will be able to open savings accounts through the postal department so they can begin to plan for their futures.

“We want the children who stay here to be able to visualize a future where they are productive members of society,” said Chennupati Vidya. “In addition to the training we provide, local industries have volunteered to train children in trades such as carpentry, tyre retreading, shoe making and automobile repair.” Each of the ten businesses that have joined the programme are within walking distance of the center so children can go for training during the day and return to the shelter at night. Once the children have gained the necessary skills, they will become eligible to be hired as regular employees.

In addition to taking part in vocational training programmes, the community has been extremely supportive of the children’s center. Sai Prasanna Construction has designed the plans for the shelter and provided expertise in purchasing the land, construction, laying the road and boring the well for the facility and the village of Panchayat is willing to providing tax concessions for the center.

-more-

About VMM:

Vasavya Mahila Mandali is a registered NGO working in Andhra Pradesh for over 40 years in the development field for the welfare of women and children in vulnerable situations. VMM began working with the street children in Vijayawada in 1999 to improve their sexual health through a grant from the AP State AIDS Control Society.

To date VMM has provided services to more than 42,000 street children who have run away from their families. These services include counseling on prevention of STIs and HIV, helping children form into community based organizations, start bank accounts and receive vocational and literacy training.

###