



**AUSTRALIND
CHILDRENS
FUND**

Make a Difference

NEWSLETTER FEB 19.

EDITORS: Sarah Priestley
+ Ashley Vines

Australind Childrens Fund is a non-profit, volunteer-driven organization that works with organizations and communities in India with a focus on health and education for children with disability and disadvantage. For more information, visit:

 <https://www.australindchildrensfund.org/>

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PREMA VASAM
Chennai, India



MITHRA
Chennai, India



**JOHNSONS SECONDARY
SCHOOL**

Herbertpur, Northern India



PARIJAT ACADEMY
Guwahati, Assam, India

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(left) Indra holding Ambika and Charles' new baby Amalia Lourthu Mary, (right) Sarah and Baranika, (far right) Mumtaj holding baby Amalia at Prema Vasam in January 2019.

REPORT FROM ASH VINES AND SARAH PRIESTLEY

We are writing this newsletter from the office at Prema Vasam Children's home - after feeding breakfast to some of the physically challenged children. Whilst we were both undertaking this daily task, we were discussing what to write for this newsletter. As we looked around the room at the carers who were also feeding some of the mentally and physically challenged children we discussed that most of these carers were also mentally and physically challenged themselves. Most of them have either grown up in, or have called Prema Vasam home for a number of years.

As Australind moves into its 41st year of operating, our capacity to support pathways for the mentally and physically challenged people in India is a story that is perhaps not told enough, and one of our most important. Like in Australia, India has a long way to go, to ensure improved levels of inclusiveness for mentally and physically challenged people in the workforce, and society at large.

Prema Vasam's motto of 'to serve, and not be served' is lived out every day, thus ensuring a culture where everyone is valued and can develop a keen sense of self-worth. The mentally and physically challenged staff work as carers, help with food preparation, assist in the office, work as gardeners in the organic garden, as laundry workers, school teachers, or assist with physiotherapy treatment. All are valued equally for their contribution and service to each other.

We continue to marvel at how Prema Vasam, Prem Illam, Mithra and Prem Nekatam all actively ensure that everybody has a role to play in their community and everyone can give back to those with whom they live. Each of the homes support children and young adults with different abilities to lead productive, social and purposeful lives.



The Pongal festival was celebrated at Prema Vasam, with special visits from Ambika and Charles, and their new baby girl, as well as Ashley and Sarah from Melbourne.





IMAGES FROM INDIA,
JANUARY 2019



(above) Indra and Monisha harvesting tomatoes at Prem Illam. (below) New cows during Pongal Celebrations.



(above left) Ashley with Pugal (above right) Sarah with Pugal in front of the cow shed at Prem Illam. (below) Lighting the fire for the Pongal pot.



To demonstrate how this is achieved, on a personal level, we would like to share the story of one of our friends, Rajkumar, who is a young man who came to Prema Vasam in his early teens.

One day Mary (who is in charge of the Prem Boys' home outside of Chennai) was in the city and witnessed a young boy being treated poorly by a man in a general store. She was appalled to see Rajkumar being beaten, and stopped to ask the store owner why he was being treated so badly. The man explained that Rajkumar has a mental disability and with no parents, he had been roaming the streets alone. The man had taken him into his shop and given him a safe-haven from the outside world. As Rajkumar was unable to work in the general store, and treated poorly as a result, Mary asked if she could assist Rajkumar by taking him to Prema Vasam. He has been there ever since. Rajkumar is now responsible for organising all the laundry for over 200 children at Prema. It is not difficult to imagine how much laundry is generated each day! With a broad smile on his face, Rajkumar carries enormous bags of laundry up and down the many stairs to the laundry, redistributes clean clothing and linen to the different rooms, and chats to the children whilst he works. He is extremely hard-working, friendly and kind, and it is hard to imagine how Prema Vasam would operate without him. Moreover, Prema Vasam has provided the culturally safe space for him the opportunity to serve. Everyone proudly tells his story, and they all show gratitude for his hard work and on-going commitment to the care and health of all the children there.

For us, Rajkumar's story can be likened to the story of Australind. As a small organisation in the world of international aid, Australind continues to make a significant impact upon those who may not have access to opportunities in their communities without our support. It is enabling and facilitating young people throughout the world to achieve their potential, regardless of any financial, mental or physical challenges they may face.

Given that Australind has no monetary overheads, every dollar raised or donated continues to make a difference and strengthens the work of our incredible Indian friends. We are helping to ensure positive impact of self-determining projects, which enables us to continue to punch above our weight with the impact of our efforts and within the International Aid space.

Ashley Vines and Sarah Priestley.

(Right) Rajkumar, pictured on the rooftop at Prema Vasam, manages the enormous job of doing the laundry of 200 children at Prema Vasam every day.



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