



## Arul Ashram: giving a new lease of life

### Description

AIDS has killed more than 25 million people worldwide since it was first identified. More than 15 million children have been orphaned by HIV. As the world is fighting with this deadly disease, Arul Ashram, a monastery located in Chinna Kalapet, Puducherry, is doing its bit by taking care of the HIV/AIDS positive people.

Arul Ashram is the monastery of the Brothers of St. John. It consists of Shanti Bhavan- a medical care centre for adults and children infected with HIV/AIDS, Jeeva Nivas the home for school-aged HIV positive children and Mary Morningstar convent-the convent of the sisters of St. John.

Shanti Bhavan, which means "House of Peace", was set up in July 1999, to care for the rapidly growing number of adults in southern India infected with HIV/AIDS. The disease marks any person as a social outcast within the society and even among family, but Shanti Bhavan is open to all men, women and children. Shanti Bhavan was one of the first HIV/AIDS care center in south India and it's an inspiring model of compassionate health care. As HIV/AIDS is considered the new leprosy of India, ignorance about disease transmission has lead to an environment of fear and exclusion.

The patients get sufficient medical and nutritional care, along with food, clothing and shelter free of cost. They are provided with sufficient help to improve their physical and psychological health. Symptomatic treatment and antiretroviral therapy (ART) are administered on a regular basis. Nearly everyone returns to a regular life situation and live a normal life. The HIV patients are engaged in various income generating schemes like making of candles, baskets, envelopes, bread, greeting cards etc. This programme aims to restore the dignity of people living with HIV/AIDS and also creates awareness. Jeeva Nivas which means "House of Life" was set up in Sep 2006 and is currently home to forty school going, HIV positive children. The children are orphaned and have been witnesses to the deadly effect of AIDS on their parents. Most of the children attend nearby schools, either in English or Tamil medium. Those who cannot attend school, receive special tutoring at Jeeva Nivas. The main objective of Jeeva Nivas is to make the children feel comfortable and give them strength and confidence. It also aims to give proper education to fend for themselves once they move out from the ashram.

From Aug 2008, the Community Care Centre (CCC) funded by Pondicherry AIDS Control Society (PACS) has also started functioning at Arul Ashram. Some PU students also volunteer here. Just like the saying that every single drop counts in an ocean, every single deed by this ashram makes a better world.

### Category

1. Communication for Social Change

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