



# THE NEW HEROES

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## MEET THE NEW HEROES

### INDERJIT KHURANA

**Project:** Ruchika School Social Service Organization (RSSO), Train Platform Schools

**Location:** Orissa, India

As a schoolteacher, Inderjit Khurana used to take the train to work. And each day, in the stations, she would come into contact with dozens of children who spent their days begging from train passengers rather than attending school. She learned that it was not a rare or isolated problem and that millions of children in India live on the streets.

Convinced that these children would never be able to escape their conditions of poverty and homelessness without education, and realizing that it would be impossible to enroll these children in school, Inderjit decided to create a model program for "taking the school to the most out-of-school children."

Khurana's "train platform schools" aim to provide a creative school atmosphere and equip children with the basic levels of education necessary to allow them to work productively, enjoy many of life's pleasures, and become positive contributors to their communities.

Khurana's ultimate goals reach far beyond the 20 platform schools she and her colleagues have created in India's Bhubaneswar region. She is determined that her program become a model for effectively changing the lives of the poorest children throughout India and the world.

### WHAT DOES RSSO DO?

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In response to the challenges faced by children who live in the slums of Bhubaneswar, India, Inderjit Khurana founded the Ruchika Social Service Organization (RSSO) in 1985. The program is dedicated to creating a society free of child labor, destitution and exploitation by advancing the opportunities of extremely underprivileged children through education.

Initially the program consisted of a single train platform school. Today the organization reaches out to more than 4,000 underprivileged children and their families. Remarkably, the train school program is inexpensive and cost effective.

Teachers gather the children together between the stops of the train for reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and history taught through song, puppetry and other teaching devices such as the train schedules themselves.

RSSO targets mostly street children, child laborers and children of impoverished families, providing basic literacy, vocational training, nutritional information, medical treatment and emergency assistance. Some of the children are orphans who live on the street and beg to acquire the barest necessities. The rest of the children live in the slums and are sent by their parents to beg at the train station.

Khurana recently came to realize that the education of these children is practically impossible when the most basic needs of their families are not being met. So she expanded the program to provide food and medicine to their families.

Khurana maintains that every child has the right to an education and vows that if the child cannot come to the school, then the school must come to the child.



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### DR. GOVINDAPPA VENKATASWAMY ("DR. V.") & DAVID GREEN

**Project:** Aravind Eye Hospital and Aurolab

**Location:** Madurai, India, Nepal and United States

Dr. Govindappa Venkataswamy and David Green use what Green terms "compassionate capitalism" to give sight and hearing back to millions of people who would otherwise be blind and deaf.

Dr. V. came to the conclusion as a young man that "intelligence and capability are not enough. There must be the joy of doing something beautiful." So instead of retiring at the age of 65, Dr. V. mortgaged his home and opened a hospital to perform free or low-cost cataract surgery — if untreated cataracts can lead to blindness — on poor Indians. In his first year, Dr. V. performed 5000 surgeries.

Green was inspired by Dr. V.'s belief that humans were put on Earth not get to rich, but to serve. He noticed that the number of surgeries Dr. V. could perform was limited by the high cost of replacement lenses — \$150.00 a pair. When Green discovered that the actual cost of making the lenses could, with a creative approach, be reduced to just \$10.00 a pair, he convinced Dr. V. to open a lens factory.

Green is convinced that western capitalism has failed to grasp opportunities in the developing world because of a focus on extracting the highest possible profit from every item sold. He says "compassionate capitalism" extracts a small amount of profit from each item sold, but generates a very high sales volume. In the process, it is possible to make available critical goods and services — like eye care — to billions of people.

### WHAT DO ARAVIND EYE HOSPITAL AND AUROLAB DO?

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Dr. V. and David Green are dedicated to making medical technology and health care services accessible, affordable and financially self-sustaining. More than two million surgeries a year are performed at Aravind Eye Hospital using products made through Aurolab, such as intraocular lenses, spectacle lenses, optical lenses, suture needles, cataract kits and hearing aids.

Aurolab's products are used by eye care institutions and ophthalmologists in more than 120 countries. The factory produces hundreds of thousands of lenses each year — 10 percent of the world supply — at \$5.00 a pair. The company turns a profit of thirty percent on its investment. With the revenue stream produced by Aurolab, Dr. V. has been able to open five new eye hospitals in southern India.

Through Aravind Eye Hospital and Aurolab, Dr. V. and David Green have performed what might as well be miracles for elderly Indians living in remote villages. Restoring their sight and hearing has given them back their dignity and allowed them to contribute to their communities again.



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