

An Orphan Smiles Again

Mukesh was already an orphan before the tsunami hit his village in Pondicherry. His father deserted the family shortly after he was born, and his mother died from a fall when he was only six months old. After the Tsunami, his guardian, his maternal grandmother, enrolled him in a local preschool, which is operated by PCI with support from USAID. Initially, he was very shy, listless, and would not interact with the teachers or other children. In addition, the teachers noticed a severe rash on his body. Fortunately, within a week after Mukesh enrolled, a teacher referred him and his grandmother to the Baxter-sponsored PCI mobile health clinic, which stops at his preschool once a week. The mobile clinic doctor prescribed some ointments and recommended that his grandmother have him tested for HIV. Initially, the grandmother refused, but after a PCI counselor with the mobile clinic followed up by visiting her at home and provided her more information one-on-one, the grandmother changed her mind.

Unfortunately, Mukesh was found to be HIV positive. Once the young boy was tested, his grandmother shared more of his family history. She informed the PCI staff that her daughter was found to be HIV positive when she was pregnant with Mukesh, which contributed to her son-in-law's decision to desert the family. Although the outcome of his HIV test was positive and he had a very rough start in life, the support and medical care Mukesh and his grandmother received from the PCI mobile health clinic has made noticeable improvements in his life and the outlook he and his grandmother have for Mukesh's future. He has been referred to a district hospital to receive regular CD4 count testing, nutritional support, and counseling, which has helped resolve his rash and provide him with more energy. Now he runs and plays in the schoolyard like the other children and is eager to learn new things. He even has a new "sister." Mukesh calls the PCI counselor who helped his grandmother and him, *Thai*, which means sister in the Tamil language. He eagerly awaits her weekly visits to his pre-school with the PCI mobile health clinic.