

## Caring for Children in Chennai

AFTER GRADUATING, Michael Schachter '09 and Allie (Rosene-Mirvis) Schachter '09 spent part of a year traveling abroad—in Ghana, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, and Australia. They also spent six months living in Chennai, India, where Michael studied South Indian classical music and Allie began volunteering with the Madras Christian Council of Social Service (MCCSS), a nongovernmental organization dedicated to promoting

human rights and supporting marginalized groups in Chennai. Through MCCSS, the couple had the opportunity to meet trafficking victims and their children, and to work very closely with many of the children, from helping with homework in the evening to taking them to medical appointments. The main priority was helping the children feel safe and supported.

"It was such a powerful experience, and the need was so palpable, that we felt compelled to not leave it all behind and just say, 'That was fun,'" Michael recalls. And indeed, when the couple returned to the States in 2010, they didn't. Partnering with MCCSS, they created the Chennai Children Foundation ([chennaichildren.com](http://chennaichildren.com)), a nonprofit corporation that "connects American sponsors with child victims of human trafficking in Chennai, India." Donations from sponsors pay for school fees, after-school tutoring, school uniforms, and other educational supplies.

"We're making sure that we can take on as many new students as we can," says Michael. The couple spend time weekly com-



The Schachters with children they have helped in Chennai

COURTESY OF MICHAEL SCHACHTER

municating with their partners in India and reaching out to potential donors by phone, e-mails, and letters. They encourage donors to build relationships with the children they help, to make the experience all the more meaningful.

"Knowing that this education is laying a solid foundation upon which the children can break out of cycles of poverty and abuse is extremely rewarding," says Allie. The foundation now supports close to 20 chil-

dren, and this past spring, its first group of seniors graduated from high school. All of six of the graduates, Michael reports, "are either in professional programs or college—which is amazing, considering [that] a few years ago, they were barely in school and had such difficulty adjusting to a normal life."

The Schachters now live in Ann Arbor; Michael is pursuing a Ph.D. in music composition and theory and Allie works at Ozone House, a nonprofit that assists homeless and runaway youth. They have returned to Chennai twice since 2010 and plan to visit again this spring; between visits, they keep in touch with the children as much as possible by e-mail and phone. "Right now," Michael says, "we want to continue to keep [the foundation] small enough so that we can have a personal relationship with everybody that we're supporting. We think that depth really makes the difference between success and failure." But because the couple also know that the need is great, he adds, "As of right now, that's our vision. But we are certainly open for things to grow." ~NU XIONG