



PORTRAITS OF KINDNESS

FROM AUROVILLE

“Kindness is an indispensable step towards the widening and illumination of the consciousness.”

- The Mother

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* name has been changed on request

The story of this book...

This booklet forms part of a year-long project exploring The Potential of Kindness in Auroville. It emerges from an understanding of the transformative power of sharing kindness stories—their ability to connect hearts and inspire kindness in others.

This booklet brings together a snapshot of nineteen intimate conversations with Aurovilians, each sharing their own experience of kindness.

The stories featured are from those Aurovilians who responded to our invitation from a randomly selected list of Auroville residents. This approach - of random selection - was important to us because we believe every person carries a kindness story within them. We wanted to capture voices from across the community, without bias toward gender, nationality, or beliefs.

Each person was asked the same questions: to share moments when they received, offered, or witnessed an act of kindness. We also asked what kindness means to them and what barriers might prevent them from giving or receiving it.

Together with each participant, we chose one or two stories to feature here. The wider conversations will also inform the project's research report.

Where possible, we've included each participant's name. However, we respected the wish for anonymity when requested, understanding and appreciating this can be a vulnerable topic for reflection. We share these stories with much love and joy.

Helen, Nikethana, Alessandra and Anisha



Helena

Since being in Auroville, I think what has moved me the most is the support I received from the other parents. When we have a baby and we're here far away from home it can feel very lonely and difficult. It was definitely my experience, especially for my first baby and very quickly, I connected with the mom's group.

The mother's group had started this initiative that when you give birth, for one month, they provide food for you. They called it 'Made with Love'. They would ask people to sign up, and then every day, a different person would cook food for you. They would deliver food at your house or somewhere convenient. They would ask about your food preferences and for a month, we received food every day. From so many different houses. they would just drop the food outside and leave. We would just open the tiffin and be like, "oh! What is for dinner tonight?" We had such good food and I could see the love in the food and it was so moving. It meant my husband could be more present with me, with the baby. It was just one of the most beautiful acts of kindness that I experienced being in Auroville.

I felt nourished by the food, and I felt nourished with love and with tenderness. I had so much gratitude. They didn't gain anything by doing that. They really did it like, "Oh, we want to help this family; we want to let them experience the first few weeks as much as they can." So there was nothing behind it. So when I say that kindness, for me, has this quality of doing something without expecting anything in return – I really felt that very strongly in this.

And in the mothers group, especially those who put their children at TLC there is a strong bond. Every day, I receive messages like, "Can you take my son this morning?" And between us we always find a way... It gives this reassurance in those moments of fear. We know that we have this safety net which is always there. So to watch it for myself, to watch all the people doing this together, it's soothing and brings this softness and this trust. Sometimes we don't see it anymore because we don't pay attention. But it's there in so many ways.



Nausheen

As I see, kindness is intrinsic to human nature. It's nothing that needs to be cultivated. It's part of who we are. It is a baseline thing.

For example, this morning there were people working from Road Service. I felt it was an extreme act of kindness happening just in the way this group of people come and do their job, the way they were interacting. They were there almost full morning. There were a lot of things that needed to be cleared, a lot of debris needed to be collected. So the way they were organizing it and then, settling down for breakfast, and then lunch. There was a sense of kindness in all of those acts.

It's something that's so much part of our day-to-day being that we don't notice it, we don't even need to in a way. It's like, do we notice that we're breathing? Or that it's happening all the time? It's that intrinsic. We notice it in the absence or the refraining of. To even say 'acts of kindness', I'm sitting and segmenting things out, which is not how we really function. It's just there and then with everything in the being.

If you start looking at it, then you can see everything that goes in that spirit. Because even for us to feel okay about things, there has to be this sense of kindness towards each other, towards our environment, towards everything. Like, if a cat is not fed, you feel that. Or someone's being bad to a dog, you notice there's something that's not right. But taking care of the dog, feeding the cat, they can be looked at as acts of kindness, but what's so special about it? It's just very, very normal.

Acts of kindness happen too. I tend to have a lot of accidents. So every time I fall, it's like extreme benevolence and kindness happening. One time I hit my head and I was flat out unconscious. Someone called an ambulance and put me onto it. But this is just not once since I had quite a few accidents. And it's not just that someone helped you. It's not just this one point. Someone also took care of your bike. Someone didn't rob you. Those are acts of kindness too. It's like a whole circle of things that go around an event.



Shankar

I fell in love and got married, but after that, my life collapsed. My elder brother told me, 'I got you married, now you have no right to this house.' He kicked me out. We came out of that house with just the clothes we were wearing. My children were very small. We had nothing. I couldn't even afford rent.

We stayed at the Edayanchavadi Cemetery for two years. It was a horrible time. Once a week, they would burn the garbage nearby, and the smoke would choke us. We couldn't sleep at night because there were so many snakes in the building. I would stay awake, watching to make sure the snakes didn't come near my children. We had no help. None of my relatives came to support us. That's when Auroville became my home.

Auroville is the place that supported me and took care of me. So many people have helped me. Some kind people gave me a bed and even a fridge, which I still use today. I always tell people, it was Mother's grace. I feel like she has always been there for me. I will always be grateful when I do anything, every single day, and I have so much gratitude for her. I do this automatically, and this is my life now.

Today, I am very happy. I am very peaceful. I got help from Auroville, from Matrimandir. That is why I work day and night. Even if the pipe breaks at night, I'll go. I don't feel sad. I work day and night. When I go to Matrimandir, I forget all my problems. Even yesterday, I was feeling low, but after being at Matrimandir, I was fine. I've overcome so much, and Auroville helped me through it all.

Kindness? For me, it's simple. It's enough if I don't disturb others. It's enough if I don't make others suffer. If I can help, I will. I have helped others as much as I can. That is important for a human. If someone asks me for help, I will definitely help them. I cannot help with money but if there is any help I can do physically, then I will do it for sure. Even today morning, we came here after helping some people. That is how life is going.

And if I can't help, I will at least not harm. That is enough for me.



Elaine

Recently I was having my house painted and outside my bedroom, there's a balcony, roof and two lights. One of the lights came down, leaving a hole in the ceiling. Daily I would watch a hoopoe; she came to the hole many times during the day. She came with food, gripped the wire of the dangling light fixture and put her head inside the hole. So, I knew there was a nest inside the ceiling.

A few days into the painting project, the contractor said, 'I'm going to fix the light'. I said, 'Be careful, there's a nest in the ceiling and I'm sure there's a baby inside the nest'. I never saw or heard the bird, but the mother was obviously feeding something.

When I came back home, the contractor told me he fixed the light and sealed the hole. I asked, "Did you check to see if the baby bird was there?" He said, 'No, it's fine'.

A day or two later I saw the mother totally distressed with food in her beak. So I asked the contractor again, "Are you sure there was nothing in the ceiling?" He said, 'No, there wasn't anything there'.

The next day, I was lying on my bed reading and I could hear a bird inside the ceiling. It was the first time I heard the baby bird. It was in this dark space. It couldn't get out, it was suffering and confused. The mother bird was also distressed, coming many times during the day with food. So, I went outside and spoke to one of the workers, and said, 'There's a bird that's been sealed inside the ceiling where the light fixture was repaired. I would like you to open it and release the bird'.

He asked me to wait for the contractor to come. I told him, 'No, I'm not comfortable with that because we don't know when he will return. The bird has been trapped in there for two days'

After lunch he went up and removed the light fixture. I went inside and watched, first, a little head came out, then the baby bird pushed itself out of the hole and flew away. This brought me so much joy, despite knowing I will never see the mother or baby bird again.



Shanta

It was about '92. I was a newcomer with my son, in a newcomer house. My son was eight years old and we invited a friend of him for the weekend. Close to the newcomer house, we made a small fire and we took dinner, three together around the fire. After that, we put water to stop the fire, without risking anything.

On Monday, when I came back to the community for lunch from my work at Matrimandir, I met an Aurovillian who was in this community for a long time. He said, 'Shanta, you made a fire yesterday. You are totally crazy. You want to make fire to our community?'

I said 'No, no, I don't want. I have a water can, and we make a fire, we have dinner. I do not take any risk.' He said 'Yes, but our community is very dry, and you are totally crazy. Do it once more like that, and you have to go out of the community.'

And you see a newcomer, a big Aurovillian, I was shocked, to have the reaction. In the evening, it was time to go to sleep, and I sat on my bed, and I was thinking of the day, and I was crying, because it was a little hard to present the thing like that.

And then suddenly, I was thinking of him, and I thought, oh, to act, or to speak like that, he cannot be happy with himself. And then, suddenly, it came naturally, not from here [the mind], it came here [the heart]. I felt lots of compassion for him. It was Monday evening.

Then on Wednesday I have the service to cook in the afternoon. I went to the community kitchen and start to cook. Again, this Aurovillian passed in front of the window. I thought, 'oh, must I prepare myself again?' But I continue to cut food.

He came to me and said, 'Shanta, I am coming to tell you, sorry. You see, I am a monster.' And when I heard that, I took him, like that [in a hug], and said, 'Look, it is no problem, but next time try to express yourself a little softer.' He said 'Yes, yes, I will try'. You see. And until now we are friends.

I was sure that when I start to think of him spontaneously he received something.



Uma

Some years back I noticed that it was very easy for me to give, it was damn difficult to receive. To break that shackle, it took me quite an effort, a lot of prayers, a lot of silence and nagging mama that grant me this, allow me a possibility so that I can receive and not feel guilty about it. It still goes on but a big chunk is gone.

When kindness was given to me I noticed that I was awkward, and I noticed in multiple ways that I didn't have a capacity to ask for it and if it's given I didn't know how to receive it. I am much more comfortable in receiving today.

So it was Covid time. Our kitchen in Rohini went into minus. Every Sunday we do breakfast for the collective. It was not 'pay it forward' or even that you contribute, if you like to, yes but we don't ask. So we were in minus in the kitchen and the whole drama began that I had to ask and how, the whole plotting. I would rather write what I would say and every time my stomach would feel very bad about it. Then I went to five people and said 'I need help', and four of them came up and said 'Ouch, of course yes, you never asked for it and I never thought about it and never even inquired how the system functioned.'

So that incident stayed with me as a learning to receive and being grateful of the kindness of people and they were also willing to do the kindness, they simply had not wired in their head, they were waiting to be asked. So story is that our brains are wired and waits for asking, so our kindness doorway opens. We are not yet proactive enough to anticipate and go kind, there are very few people can do it.

My learning was do I anticipate and go and do an act of kindness without asking or I am also waiting for someone else to ask for, [only] then I will open my kindness pathway.



Dhanalakshmi

Kindness does not need to be an act. It could be something we feel within, even if I don't do anything. I may see someone working on the roads in the hot sun. I may not have time to stop but I still feel kindness towards them, wishing they had food and water.

I am touched by the kindness of the earth. It shows its kindness in many many ways to us that we are not aware of. It offers everything to our life, but our mind doesn't see this. I am also thinking of kindness that one should show towards inanimate objects we use. Any gadgets or mechanical instruments I use - I think of them as my friend. I treat them with care and kindness and often they will stay in good condition for many years.

One kindness story that stays with me is a time I was travelling on the train. There was one person nearby who was crying. He was very upset. It turned out he had just lost five thousand rupees. He was just a security worker, so for him it was the whole month's salary. While getting on the train it seems he bought something. Then somehow he lost the money.

He was so upset that he couldn't sleep at all. Instead, he was talking about it, and he kept sharing the story with us. It touched me because he also shared that it was his birthday, and the Mother always said what a special day our birthdays were. So for that to happen for him, especially on his birthday, it touched me deeply. I was also concerned because he was an older man. Without his money for the month how would he eat? How would he survive?

Later I shared his story with a woman in the next compartment. She said 'I know someone who picked up a purse.' She had heard this earlier on the train. But it was a train of thousands of people and she wasn't sure she could remember who said it. She wasn't sure what they looked like. And she didn't know where to find them.

But despite that, this woman and her husband went down the train trying to find the person. It was night and they went through so many bogies. It wasn't possible. But somehow, maybe because of goodwill, she found that person. She found the man's money within just 30 minutes. It was a miracle. Something impossible on a train with so many people. How do you find a person? Maybe that was kindness.



Jean

I was on a one month cycle trip. One day, after cycling for a few hours I realized I left my power bank to charge at the campsite I had stayed at. It was soon to be dark so I needed to hitch-hike back to get it.

I left my cycle and took two cars. The second car was a ten-minute trip. The people were maybe intoxicated and there was a big bulldog in the back. They were like, "get in the car, don't worry, the dog is friendly." I looked at the dog. He was in distress. My intuition was telling me, 'don't get in the back', but they were like, "don't worry, he's friendly, get in". The moment I got in, the dog bit me, tore a hole through my ear, and I started bleeding. Because we were in the middle of nowhere, they took me to the campsite.

The moment I got there people I didn't know saw my ear and came to me. One person offered something to drink, to eat. One person was actually a doctor, so had a look at the ear and cleaned it up. She recommended going to the emergency and getting stitched up. I was indifferent but she was like 'if it gets infected while you're cycling, it could mess up your trip'. I was like, 'okay, I don't have a car, the closest town is one hour and a half away'. Someone was like, 'I can't drive you, but I can lend you a car'. Someone was like, 'I could drive you'. The lady from the campsite was like 'I'll leave you keys to a hut you can sleep in'. Six people that I didn't know all came in to help in whichever way they could.

Moments like this you realize that you're not alone, that everyone is dealing with issues and the more we're in solidarity, and we see each other, and the more we're there for each other, the better our life is.

The cyclist (who drove me to emergency, spent hours with me there, and drove back) shared a story. Some weeks earlier his tyre burst. He was stranded in the middle of nowhere. Eventually a caravan decided to help, driving three hours to the next town to fix his cycle. The person who helped him told him, you don't have to do anything for me, just help seven people. So I was like, okay, I'll make sure that I intentionally help at least seven people too.



Renuka

From the beginning, we were with other people's kindness. My whole family. Since I was born, my parents have been in Auroville. Since then, we have been living with other people's kindness. I don't feel shy. We don't go to anyone to ask for their support – it just happens. That is our lifestyle. If it wasn't for the kindness of others, we wouldn't have come to this level.

When I was a child, we didn't have a school in the village. Even though my parents were Aurovilians, we didn't have an established school. All the kids from our village went to New Creation School – that was our first step. From there, we moved on. My parents didn't have the educational background to help, so we were put in boarding. In that lifestyle, we needed support. Even for small things, like if a soap was over, they would give us one – that was a different life.

Now when I compare myself with others, they say I am wrong. But for me, nothing is wrong – this is how I grew up. I don't have any regrets.

When I give kindness, it is moral support. I can't give financial help. But if someone approaches me for advice, I support them 100%. In my family, when my sister's husband was very sick, I was with her in the hospital day and night for a month, even though my own husband was unwell. After that, my brother, who was like a pillar for us, passed away unexpectedly. It was a big loss for us all. Now I go regularly to visit my brother's children and be with them – they need someone they can talk to, and I want to be there the way my brother would have been.

People ask, why do they help me? I didn't do anything for them. But they do it because they have it. I don't need to ask. When I receive kindness, I thank them, but I can't always accept everything. If someone offers more than I need, I say no. I don't want to disturb others – I want to do what I can, and be fair.



Angelica

When my daughter Ambar was born we started receiving flowers in the house. We don't know from whom. Small angels, small incense, and tiny things that we didn't know from where, hanging on the door. So that was beautiful. Letters saying things like, 'I heard a baby crying, this is a blessing,' and from people that we really don't know. For me, that was something like, wow. I felt touched and I felt cared for, and part of something, no? Like belonging to something bigger than the three of us.

I think kindness is also something about being truthful or being unique with your actions. It's like the deepest of the deepest of you. Like this magic ingredient that you bring, that only you have. It could be equal to compassion, or empathy, somewhere there, but it's very unique to each one of us.

Now I have this impulse with Ambar of course – that urge of being soft, gentle, nice, sweet with another being. And then I keep thinking, most probably I was showing all this love and care when I was in the kitchen at PTDC, through the food. It gave me satisfaction. It was a feeling of happiness.

At the same time, my feeling with Ambar is not about how she behaves with me. When I was in the kitchen, I did not care who said thank you or not. But when people did, it was beautiful. And I don't think they did only to make us happy. Maybe that is kindness? It's giving without even wanting to know what the result is. It's just the act.

So it's this thing–depending on your stage of life, you're kind to many people or to fewer people, and it keeps increasing and decreasing. But the intensity is the same. I think people can't go through life without being kind. Without being unique, without being present in the lives of someone else.

And again, you're moving with this impulse or with this energy, who knows from where it's coming. You don't have time to think. When you think too much – 'Okay, I'm going to help someone, or I am going to cook for people – that's another quality, there is mind there. But doing something just because it needs to be done, its the most natural thing. I have no idea where it comes from. But not the mind.



Faani Hyder*

I killed an animal –a little pup. It was an act of kindness, I think.

I came across it, a little puppy, badly wounded. I was just walking somewhere and along the road saw the injured pup. I don't know what had happened to it . Maybe he was hit by something but there was a ghastly gash and he was in a terrible state...

It wasn't possible to get help. It was not possible to carry him. Not possible to call a vet. Not possible to help him in any way. The pup had no hope for survival, only it would have suffered longer and eventually died. . So rather than leave him there with his suffering I decided to end his suffering.

It was out of kindness. I know it was to stop somebody from living but my act was not cruel. It may look cruel , it appears evil but it was not. Killing someone has everything in it that looks like cruelty. But it is the intention behind the act that ultimately determines whether it is 'kindness' or 'cruelty'. I think basically, kindness is an act of selflessness, to be able to put yourself in the other person's shoes, to sympathize, to empathize.

It was not easy for me. It was a terrible struggle to put an end to an innocent being.

Kindness does not have a particular appearance. It could seem like a cruel act but if the intention behind it is to help somebody, relieve somebody that is in pain then it is kindness, I think.

In the Indian pantheon there is the Trinity: Brahma, the creator; Vishnu who sustains mortal life and Mahesh, the destroyer. Kali is one of the shakties, the operative force of Mahesh or Shiva. Iconographically She is always depicted as a dark, fierce goddess with a garland of human skulls around her neck, her red tongue hanging out, a naked hatchet in her hand. The last thing anyone would associate with such an image is kindness. But Kali is said to be the most benevolent Mother goddess!

The story of the pup seems to me like the Kali principle in operation. Mother Kali (through me) had the pup slayed and thus put an end to that soul's suffering. The soul of the pup was released from its mortal bondage and was free to be born again with a new body and, hopefully, in better conditions.



Lakshay

I remember one teacher who was very kind to me. I grew up in poverty. I did not have two sets of uniform. We had a funny situation where Monday to Friday we had blue and white, and on Saturdays we had white and white. I was class monitor. Every Saturday I would punish myself because I was not wearing the right clothes, but I only had one set of clothes, so I had to wash and wear it again. And then this teacher found me a set of clothes.

But I found that I couldn't take it. There was no animosity. She was the kindest person. I felt so sweet that she noticed it. There were 30, 40 staff members, and she was the one who saw it. So it was very beautiful. I still remember her very vividly.

So there were many people who were kind to me, and I am, in return, have immense gratitude even now. But that instance itself, now I look up, look at it, and I'm like, she didn't do anything wrong, but it's an act itself, you see. I didn't question her. I questioned the system.

There is this whole thing that if you're below the poverty line, your fees get waived off, and they call on your annual day and give you some prize money for poor children, this kind of thing. I'm more kind towards myself right now in taking kindness. Back then, when I really needed it, I was very repulsed by it.

I try to look at it from a very objective point of view. Kindness towards, for what? Is that person looking at the act of kindness from the receiving person's point of view? Are they making sure it is devoid of ego? Is it done for something? There is an unsaid hierarchy you are creating while you give.

In the outside world, I would say it doesn't matter what the thing is, at least it is coming through. But in Auroville's sense we are not here to do the same thing. We are here to go beyond, do something else.

It pains me when I see somebody putting in News and Notes, can you fund my child's operation or to go out for higher studies? We have not succeeded in creating a society where everyone's basic needs are met. Yeah, it's in that sense I definitely yearn for.



Laure

One kindness story which is so small but which made me feel so good was when I was in my early 20s, I went traveling to South America with a friend. I left with my backpack from Paris. I was going to take my ticket to go to the airport, which is like 10 euros, like a thousand rupees. I mean, it's not cheap... I had a limited budget, I was young, I had just finished my studies, so I didn't have loads of money.

And then this woman appeared and she gave me a ticket to go to the airport. I don't remember why it happened to her that she didn't need it. But just the fact that she saw that I was most probably going to the airport because I had my backpack. One in front, one in the back, you know.

I felt very warm, just like it was loaded with positive vibes. I got a feeling of care - a feeling of kindness, of support from the universe. I was like, okay, so it starts very well, because I was gone for a year.

So yeah, this kind of thing also gives me faith in humanity, which I personally really strongly need because otherwise I find life on Earth is too difficult. It nourishes me a lot, these kind of small, small things. Like even someone that holds the door for me, which is also an act of kindness, I really appreciate these things because it's really like caring for each other whereas you don't know each other. And these are things which are so important, so small but so important. I feel that we're all on the same boat, that we're there for each other even though we don't know each other. I think it also exacerbates in some ways or nourishes that sense of non-duality. And interdependence, you know.

Kindness connects humans and we are social beings and we need that, we need social connection, we need warmth, we need care, maybe from people we know or people we don't know, it doesn't really matter. And I think when you're in deep pain or in depression or just having a bad day, it always gives joy and at least some warmth, when someone does even the smallest thing for you.

And for me, it starts just from the simplest thing, which is a smile.



Srijita

It's wonderful to witness an act of kindness. What actually enjoins me to such an act is what I have been inspired to do guided by reading Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. It is by example that kindness can happen much more than through words.

That is exactly what we are doing with our emergency services. We refer to the collected works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, as to what they have said, for example, on death, because we see many difficult situations. So how do we handle those things? Of course, what I'm doing is important, I have to be focused, but the difference is in how I'm doing it. And whether I am able to act to the best of my ability. For example, while reviving a patient, continuing CPR for one hour, and you could not revive, is it a failure? Or has the team done the best, and surrendered to The Mother? We have read frequently that when it is time for the soul to leave, it will happen. This is why it is important to read the texts and apply what we read.

We also face situations of imminent death. We talk to the family or close friends and respect their wishes. So, you're not there, to be able to speak and say, this would be probably the best way. The persons concerned have often been here many years, some have met The Mother. Many individuals don't want to go to the hospital. So for me, it's very important that we could respect their wish to go from within Auroville. So, we alleviate the suffering from the physical point of view, with whatever is required, oxygen etc. Above all, we remember the Mother and what we have read in Her writings, and some powerful lines of Sri Aurobindo's Savitri. These practices have brought in a lot of positive feedback. We are happy to get the feedback, but we do not delve too long on it, otherwise, we might tend to become proud or vain

I refrain from thinking about whether I have been kind, I do not give myself that time, because I feel then it's also an egoism. What I feel is, when I get up in the morning, I should know what I have to do, and do it as best as I can. And when I go to sleep at night I surrender to her, Douce Mere, she knows best. It's very simple.



Boobalan

A lot of people helped me. For my education, for my house, I received every time help. When I was in hard times, people came to support me. I didn't ask, it came by itself.

I also have to return. Not because you give kindness so I have to give back, but we learn from someone 'this is how it is to be kind'. That teaches me to be kind for other people. Somebody helped me, so this thing also. When I see somebody in need, I just go and do it.

When I started in Thamarai school as a teacher Bridget and Kathy were there and they helped me a lot. They were very kind to me. They used to be kind to many people. They really gave their life, their time and energy. With the village children and the volunteers, we had a good sharing. People, the kindness, it was very nice.

From this I learned to make something, and one French lady, Nadine, helped me with this. I was telling her of a small project, that I wanted to bring some village kids on a tour outside. That they had never been in the bus. So suddenly that lady gave us a donation for the tour.

So I arranged for all the village children, whoever wants to go on tour. I said, come, it's free. So we made food in the forest for everybody, lemon rice, tomato rice, like that. And we bring all the children in the bus. That was very happy for everybody!

There was nobody who didn't go in the bus. Most people had never been in the bus before. So in the bus we bring them to Thanjavur, Trichy, temple, museum, the dam, like this. Then we came home the next day. The children were very happy, I was also very happy, and the lady who gave the donation also was very happy.

Also once, in hospital, when my wife was getting a baby. There one boy was standing. I don't know him at all. I don't know what was the problem. But he was crying. I just went into him and hugged him. I said, 'Nothing will happen, don't worry'. And he started hugging me and crying. I also started crying. That was very nice.



Celestine

One person, for thirty years, always helped me. He is helping all the time without expecting anything from me.

Every time when I asked something, he would always do, and with full support, with full help. Many, many, many times. He doesn't expect anything. So, it's a very beautiful feeling, it's not one time, two times.

Continuation means it's a big thing that I can rely on. That person I can ask and he will listen. I feel very grateful

For example, this sliding door. It was very difficult all the time. Tight. You cannot close. But he said, 'I will do it'. And he did it. It is so smooth and every time I am using it, every time I think of him. It is such a very sweet thing. It is not one time you are grateful. Everytime you feel. So it is a very good thing because they get all the time blessings, good will, good thinking, continuously.

Also, I have been doing always outdoor activities, all for the community, for other people to see things. Not like in an exhibition hall, outdoor activities. Also on the road, I have been 15 years. I think anything when I do, it is for other people. So, it is a part of me.

Now I am doing in the Auroville bus stop. For four or five years I was taking care of the space. Because people are using it.

But now I am not well. So, when I went there, it was so messy. Because the flowers fall, everything falls. So finally I tried to do. But it was so difficult. It was very painful.

So, now 3 times one person has helped me. One young volunteer. I have to wait. At 6 o'clock I go for dinner. He comes only at 7.30. So I go on waiting. Then he comes, we sit together, finish our dinner. Then we come to the bus stop. And then he has to work with a torch. He manages.

Two or three years ago one internship architect was helping me for one or two months. Also he will come late. I wait for dinner. Wait for him. And then he comes. Then we sit together, eat together. Then we come and we were doing the bus stop. Until today, I am in contact. I wrote, now there is one more person like you. So, he is happy.



Patricia

I'm contemplating that this thing we call 'kindness' is probably a quality of consciousness and an act of authentic kindness is an expression from the so-called inner world. One must be inwardly connected so that an actual, honest, truthful action can come through the layers of mind, ego, and can be non-thinking and straightforward. It is the needful thing and it gets done. It doesn't carry psychological baggage of the 'doer'. The 'doer' is moved to act, not anticipating feedback or significance, and then, it's done. It happened, and 'doer' is on his way. What do you call that movement? Some might call that a miracle. Others looking on might say, 'oh, that was such a 'kind' thing to do'.

I was very touched last week. It was my birthday,. Very few people knew it was my birthday. That's on purpose. In the afternoon, someone walked in with a card, a candle, incense and a flower. Totally unexpected. And it was with such simple warmth and genuine love. I can use the human words of love or caring, but in that moment was I responding to 'kindness' behind the gesture? Kindness as a Quality, a Tone, an Atmosphere, Impersonal (the giver had signed the card with her unit's name). The sensations that go with absorbing lovely energies were such an uplift -- I just tingled. I enjoyed seeing my reactions to an event so unexpected. Then, my attention was caught by the quiet 'voice' of the little arrangement of gifts. A free expression of Giving. Giving a gift is a legitimate action for a birthday, but this circumstance seemed illuminated by a pure and free quality. Kindness.

Another time I was in a taxi going toward the gate. There was a pre-teen girl, unknown to me, standing waiting for someone. With a fluid, natural movement, she opened the gate for us; a very thoughtful thing to do but she seemed to give it no thought. Did Kindness motivate her? I don't know. It was practical and made sense, but I felt it was coming out of a very nice motivation, generous and integral, harmonious. In the taxi, my inner being stood up and applauded in recognition of the spirit behind that act in that Auroville youth. In the background was all of this construction, sound and dust. The clamor of road-building was just a few feet away, but she's opening the gate with a thoughtful gesture to smooth the taxi's transition. I felt a confirmation, a validation that the spirit is alive.



Sanjeev

Kindness for me is Metta - a form of unconditional love and motivation of wholesome action from within. It makes us stretch beyond our comfort zone of what we do from our largest and deepest BEING. It can be seen when people stretch beyond what they need to do, from care.

An act of kindness I witnessed that touched me was the effort my team at C3STREAM Land Designs (C3SLD) put to create the 'Becoming and Being a Shifu (Master)' program. This is a one-year residential program at Udayi campus that supports youth to become masters of self, competent at creating a healthy environment around them of integrity and growth, and also master a skill - VLSI layout (electronics), programming, design automation, and STEM educator.

At C3SLD we not only volunteer to support children, but also engage in high-tech employment in chip-design and embedded-systems programming. Many graduates came to C3SLD looking for a job. Most youth have certificates, but not actual skills. We noticed very few youth even knew how to be self-directed to utilize STEM Land to develop skills. They seemed a little lost, took a long time and could not gauge when to ask for support and when they needed to struggle for their own learning.

As a team, we looked at all that has helped each of us learn and grow and decided to put together a residential 1-year course that developed skills, competencies, and inner capacities. The program is unique in supporting the youth discover themselves through meditation, leadership, reading, and reflection. They get exposure to various skills that we excel at. Each Shifuiyan (as they call themselves) has one of the team members act as an individual mentor. The team took up designing the course, setting up the infrastructure, fundraising, etc to make the program happen. We even found a way to make the program free of cost with a seed donation and when the Shifuians completed the program and started working with us they contributed as a pay-it-forward to support the next set of youth to go through the program.

It is not necessary to put this program together, but we choose to do it to support learning and growth. Of course, mentoring and caring for others and the campus also strengthened our own learning and technical skills and grounded ourselves. In a way, we needed to do it to become whole ourselves. It made me feel broad, open, and whole as an instrument through which something larger is manifesting.



Mathilde

When my baby was born somebody had created a WhatsApp group for parents and when the baby is born, they bring you food. I was really surprised and amazed by this pure kindness from people we didn't even know. Just because we are in the same community and because we have a baby. It really started from day one of my baby being born that we felt that support from other parents. Really feeling gratitude and being part of a larger community.

When you are just becoming a mom, it's like already a whole life changes, a new experience, almost a new identity that you have to build, and this new connection with this being that you have never met before. There are lots of challenges and adjustments. So to have that support in that moment it's so precious, such a key time in your connection to your child. Then because I experienced it, I wanted to do the same.

So for kids that were born after my daughter, I also brought food for their parents. It felt somehow nourishing to give. I don't know that you consciously feel, 'I'm doing a kind action' but this giving fills you up inside. It feels like you're part of a bigger picture and that you're participating by your goodwill without expecting anything in return. Just the joy of supporting other people. I remember dropping food at their door and knowing that it's going to support them also in this connection with their baby.

Now that my daughter is 4 years old, I also see how kind the kids are with each other, like when one falls or cries they come and see what's happening, or how they often prepare gifts for each other. With our daughter, she loves to do drawings for her friends. Then we reach Certitude and another friend comes to her and says 'I did this drawing for you. I know you love narwhals (this fish who looks like a unicorn), so I did a narwhal drawing for you'. And it's so touching. You see this sharing out of pure kindness, it's not even really a thought or a process. For them it's just natural.

My daughter is always giving gifts. It's not something she plans, it's not something we put in her. Everywhere she goes, she picks up a flower or even a grass or a rock, and she's like 'this one will be for Papa, this one will be for Mama, or this one will be for my teacher'. That's just so beautiful, so cute, but so amazing too. Just to watch, it's heart expanding and gives a warm feeling of so much beauty in the world.

Reflections from the project team

Helen

Hearing others' reflections on kindness really opened my understanding of what kindness can be. Sometimes just a few words shared shifted something fundamental. For example, Nausheen spoke of kindness being so intrinsic to life that we don't see it. Hearing this, I suddenly noticed how traffic—especially in India—operates from a space of kindness. We avoid hitting others not simply from self-concern, but from genuine care. We could hit those more vulnerable when we'd be unharmed ourselves, but we choose not to. Instead accidents often happen when our mind is not present, because kindness requires presence.

If we are caught up in our own mental dramas, we miss opportunities to offer kindness. Since then the experience of driving has shifted into something beautiful, of witnessing these acts of kindness flowing between strangers again and again. What I once perceived as chaos and aggression has transformed into a dance of invisible kindness.



Nikethana

This year-long project exploring kindness in Auroville has been one of deep meaning and quiet transformation. It opened doors to meet Aurovilians I might never have crossed paths with otherwise - each encounter offering a glimpse into the beauty and complexity of our shared humanity. Sitting with them, listening, I often found myself moved in unexpected ways.

Their words opened something inside me, revealing both the softness and the shadows I carry. Along the way, I discovered that kindness is not a practice I need to make into my identity - it's a current that moves through me when I stop resisting what feels unkind within. When I make peace with those rough, unpolished parts of myself, compassion begins to flow effortlessly, touching others without effort or intention. This project has been a mirror, showing me that kindness is less about doing and more about being - about remembering the simple, unguarded ways our hearts know how to meet.

Alessandra

Being part of The Kindness Project as a photographer has been one of the most touching and unexpected experiences I've had in a while. Through this assignment, I was invited to meet and photograph people from my own community - many of whom I had passed on the street for years without ever truly knowing.

Each encounter felt wrapped in quiet magic. As we spoke and shared their stories, I witnessed how a simple act - listening, taking a portrait, exchanging a smile - could open hearts in ways I hadn't imagined. Many participants, moved by the experience, offered small gifts: homemade food, fruits, even lessons in making cashew cheese. These gestures were not just tokens of gratitude; they were links in a living chain of kindness.

What stays with me is this sense of connection - how kindness, once set in motion, keeps moving from one person to another, weaving invisible threads between us. I feel deeply grateful to have been part of that chain, and to see how, through something as simple as a photograph, compassion becomes contagious.



Anisha



Being part of the Kindness project in Auroville was one of the most meaningful experiences I have had. Stepping out of my comfort zone and meeting people from different cultures living in harmony, with such openness and care, taught me so much. I witnessed how kindness, though often quiet and unnoticed, can deeply shape the way we connect, heal, and grow together.

Kindness doesn't always need to be loud or visible; it's in the small gestures, the patience, the willingness to listen. Every conversation reflected warmth, empathy, and a sense of shared humanity. It showed me that kindness has the quiet power to bring people together, and to remind us of what truly matters. Whether it was through a smile, a story, or a moment of listening, I could feel how it transformed spaces and hearts alike.

My time in Auroville left me feeling hopeful, calm, and profoundly grateful, a reminder that kindness, in its purest form, is what holds communities together.

About the wider project

In a world where kindness can easily be overlooked, we wanted to pause and listen—to understand what helps it grow, and what holds it back. This project was born from a simple wish: to explore kindness not as an ideal, but as a lived, practical experience.

Over twelve months, we combined research, storytelling, and community engagement. We began with a global review of studies on kindness and compassion to understand what activities foster kindness, empathy, and connection. We then undertook several proven kindness activities—including capturing the stories in this book—and measured their impact through both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

For more information on the wider project and to read the research report, please visit www.innersightav.org/kindness

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