



Letter from the President

The Summer Volunteers are here and already making an impact in so many different ways.

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President's Letter

May is always a quiet month at Rising Star Outreach. The children are all at home for their one-month summer vacation. May was chosen for vacation because it is the hottest month of the year. It swelters! May started out to be the hottest May on record until monsoon rains mercifully came and broke the heat wave.

of Rising Star engulfs them and they settle in.

We're just finishing up the first session of summer volunteers and bracing ourselves for two more big waves in July and August. We have a phenomenal team of five coordinators this year who are heading up the program. They are full of enthusiasm and fun ideas to make this summer the best volunteer summer ever.

Highlights include a team of dentists and their families. They will attempt to screen and treat every child on campus. That's quite the challenge! We also have a week that will be reserved for the family members of Ron & Joyce Hanson, our directors in India. Everyone wants to come and see the source of all the stories!

A'lyssa Olsen is coming with her family to help start a beginning photography class. It will just be for a week or so, but should begin to open up a whole new world of expression for those involved.

Our biggest session will be 38 volunteers from the New Canaan and Salt Lake City area. They're going to be building toilets for a colony facing a terrible hygiene problem. The colony originally used the field across the way, but the field has now become a subdivision. Life can be particularly tough if you have nowhere to go to the bathroom! All the sessions will be working with a volunteer anthropology student to document the lives of the leprosy patients living in the colonies. With interpreters,

they will be spending time individually with patients, listening to and recording their life stories. As Rising Star's work progresses, we expect the outcast colony life to gradually disappear as one by one they become villages. This project is capturing the history of what so many people have endured.

As always the volunteers come with a myriad of skills. We have some dancers and music majors from Berklee School of Music in Boston. They will be working with the children in dance. One of them, Katie Winder, is coming as a representative of Promethean Spark, and will be teaching in the Peery School for Rising Stars. So there will be a lot of twirling and leaping and laughing. Being true Indians, our children are as crazy about dance as the rest of the country is!



Children showing off their new shoes-- a new "first" for our kids.

Now that June is here we're gearing up for an amazing summer of volunteers. The kids have all returned from home, bringing with them the energy and joy that has become Rising Star. We have some new faces—they're always uncertain and a little teary, at first. But it doesn't take long until the love and warmth



The new buildings are coming up and are actually starting to look like buildings. The water treatment system is underway. The volunteer guest house is slated to be the first

building completed. The race is on to see if it can be done for the big volunteer session of 38 in July. With the Hanson's skillful direction, the campus will soon look exactly like that—a campus!

The New York Times ran an article this month stating that the past 12 months has seen the largest decrease in charitable giving, ever on record. When we read things like this, it reminds us, once again, of the tender mercies of God. So far, in the midst of the worldwide economic downturn, Rising Star has continued to receive support from our sponsors and donors. We feel very blessed for the support of each of you. Thank you for hanging in there with us!

Becky Douglas

Anthropology Project

This summer our volunteers are working hard to gather the life stories of the leprosy affected families we work with. They inevitably come away with amazing stories of loss, tragedy, healing, and hope. The project is being led this summer by Kaity Gale, and we asked her to share with you one of the stories she has recently come upon:



Udayakumar is a painter in the Bindu Art School in Bharthapuram leprosy colony. 55 years old now, he contracted leprosy when he was 34. Before leprosy, he painted fishing boats and worked as a fisherman. He told us that he was completely shattered when he contracted the disease; he was depressed and "felt like a mental person." At that time his wife left him, and even now he sees the rest of his family very rarely, maybe once a year. He came to the Bharthapuram Leprosy Colony nine years ago, but didn't feel like he had a purpose in

life until he began painting with the art school in 2005.

I asked him to speak about his travels with the art school, and he spoke about going to Austria and Calcutta as opportunities that have appeared for him only since he contracted leprosy. He said he didn't travel before the disease, and it is a miracle that now he has been able to. During our interview, I asked Udayakumar if it was difficult for him to share his story with me, especially when I ask him about the harder times in his life, and his response touched my heart. He said to me, (a stranger in his colony who has only been there one short week), "We are talking like brother and sister, why should it be hard? I would share this with my father and mother, so why should I not share it with you?"

I daily remind myself that the best thing we can do for the people in the colonies is love them. They blossom under that love. This has been so true in our anthropology project this summer – as we love the people, they welcome us into their homes and lives and share their stories with us, so that we may learn from them and be inspired by them and the amazing lives they have lived.

Volunteer Stories

Please Note!! There are still a few openings left in our August 2-22 Session. For more information and an application go to: www.risingstaroutreach.org/volunteerinindia

(From Katie Winder)

Each day is different and full of new experiences. For example, yesterday I actually joined the medical group in hopes of doing some movement therapy with some of the leprosy afflicted. However, when we got going we found out that we needed to help take many of the patients from one of the colonies to the hospital, so we drove nearly two hours into Chennai to escort the leprosy patients. It was nice to see the city and how the public hospitals are run in a different country.

When we arrived, they just dropped us off and said "good luck" which was definitely an adventure. I spent the day helping a leprosy-affected man who was completely blind. I sat with him in the waiting room in the ophthalmology unit and then helped him get from doctor room to doctor room. When he first arrived, I helped him sit down and he mumbled something in broken Tamil. I leaned over and told him, my name is Katie. He smiled a big yellow-toothed smile and reached out to give me a big hug. He hugged me on both sides and then moved his hands across his chest in a cross like fashion.

Than brought, his hands together in a prayer position and cocked his head up to the sky. With his frail hands, he took my hands and cupped them in his. He would look up to

the heavens and then kiss my hands, he was blessing me, I just knew it and the spirit was strong. The first time he did this I started to tear up. Everyone in the clinic was watching us and I was glad that this man could not see the horrified and dirty looks that everyone was giving us because of his obvious case of leprosy.



While waiting for the doctors I would take his stubby hands with the bones showing through the skin and rub them. Leprosy kills the nerves and so I don't believe he could feel me doing this but somehow he knew because he would calm down and then proceed to bless me again. Although I was not "dancing" yesterday I was deeply moved by the simple power of human touch and how we ALL need to open our hearts and just LOVE.

(From Carly Jo Porter)

The last few days I have had the incredible opportunity to visit a leprosy colony and visit with some people who are leprosy affected. Rising Star Outreach is working on an anthropology project this summer where they will be interviewing the people in the leprosy colonies and finding out their life stories. I cannot even describe the powerful affect that these people have already had on me. Yesterday I walked around the colony with a translator and visited with three different people. I will briefly describe my interview with the first man.

Subramanayan is 60 years or older and is living in the leprosy colony of Bharathapuram. He lives in a humble small room that was very dirty and had a small mat that he slept on, on the ground. When I approached with the translator he was very happy to talk to us, but still had very little energy. The color in his eyes had turned a yellowish color, I'm assuming that many years of suffering and having leprosy has made them this way. The first thing that he told me when I sat down with him was that today is a good day to die.

He was born in Kanjibadi with his parents; they died when he was 4 years old. He moved to Bangledor where he lived with his Grand-

mother who also died. He likes to be alone. He came to the colony so that he could be alone, but he does have friends at the colony who are helping him. He now has no family. His older sister died of tuberculosis about ten years ago. He had a wife but she died several years ago as well. The only way that he has made money was from weaving pants when he was younger. Before he was really sick he would go to the village to beg, but now he is too sick to even go and beg.

All he feels that he needs is one meal a day to get him by, and sometimes it is even extremely hard to get one meal a day. He also spoke with me about his religion and his feelings on God. He is Hindu but believes that there is only one God who watches over all. He knows that God gave him this trial and he is waiting for the day to greet him again.



Sitting and talking with this man helped remind me of many things. It is hard to understand why God gives some of his children some amazingly hard trials. This man has suffered his entire life and has had no family to endure it with. But despite the trials he has been given, he continues to give thanks to his God daily. He said that God gives him the confidence to move on. Near the end of the interview I got very emotional and told the man that his heavenly father loves him so much and that he loves all of his children equally. I took hold of both of his hands and he was so surprised because being a person affected by leprosy you feel as if you are cursed. No one voluntarily will touch them. It is amazing the affect that a small touch of love will have on a person. Not only was I helping him, but he was helping me. Amazing.

Hanson's Hello

The children are back, the children are back... What else can we say! With all the

energy that can be packed into these little tough Indian bodies, they have returned. How happy and joyful it makes all of us. They look so adorable in their uniforms, which now includes black socks and shoes: we're trying to get them looking more like the classy students in a classy school which they are! The shoes and socks do fly off fast at the end of the school day--my guess is they feel miserable.

The first group of volunteers also arrived simultaneously with the children. What an outstanding group of fourteen, directed by five wonderful coordinators. It is hot, but there are no complaints. These volunteers are working so hard in the colonies (medical and social histories) and with the tutoring program for the children. The volunteers enhance the after-school activities of the children and later put the young to bed with stories. Meanwhile, some take the older ones to school for 1½ hours of study time. The energy of these four outstanding men and ten beautiful women has lifted the entire campus. Thank you to all who feel in their hearts the joy of serving!

The building program is now into a twenty-four hour cycle. It is crunch time to get the three buildings done as scheduled. All three of the buildings are "Rising". The most exciting day was Saturday, the 6th of June.

The concrete pour on the floor of the upper level of the school was begun. The traditional puja took place (blessing for safety and success) and then a crew of about 80 went into action. It was like the old wind-up toys where suddenly everyone had a specific job and started doing it: bringing the gravel, sand and cement to the mixer, making the concrete, raising it up to the second floor, filling the heavy pans that mainly the women carry on their heads to carry to the place where it is dumped.

The line makes a hairpin turn to get more concrete, while the men begin the leveling process. All the while, everyone is walking on



tied rebar, many barefoot. It is a rhythm that has been learned over centuries as things have not changed much--there is a great deal of inexpensive labor in India so there is no need for much machinery. It is beautiful and mesmerizing, and almost spiritual. These beautiful people work so hard!

We are saying goodbye to two of the most incredible volunteers--Matthew and Sara Hughes Zabawa. This darling young couple (very newly married) came to Rising Star in January. Matthew left at the end of May, but Sara has stayed on until the middle of June to see a smooth transition of the programs that she has implemented. They both gave an incredible boost to our purpose here at Rising Star Outreach. Our goal is to lift the children to truly become outstanding citizens of India. That's a tall order, and it hasn't been easy to find the right keys to aid in this endeavor: we want these children to be moral, honest, responsible, caring and to understand that all choices have consequences. The Zabawas have brought some wonderful programs to Rising Star that are going to be continued.

It has been a dream of Sara's, all her life, to serve in India. She was well prepared to implement some major programs, including the first "Stay Alive Program" HIV/AIDS prevention program in India at RSO. Sara and Matt worked together on gearing this to be age and culturally appropriate for our children. Together, they organized and conducted a boys

and girls maturation classes for the teenage children. Sara also has been the leader in structuring a required moral science curriculum for the School to provide basic moral principles that emphasize practical application.

"Your Body Belongs to You" is another school-wide program Sara adapted to each grade level to help children to learn to protect themselves from physical and sexual abuse. Sara established a girl's group for the older girls. The girls found this a safe place to talk about important topics like sexual abuse,

peer pressure, and general growing up problems. They established a weekly program in the children's families to reinforce moral principles within the hostel setting.

Matthew's contributions were also tremendous. The design and construction of our basketball hoop, a farming project that may become a mini-micro business for the children, after school sports program, and the beginning of the photo documentation of the leprosy affected wounds to assist the doctors in the newly introduced "self care" treatment. The greatest of Matthew's many wonderful contributions may be the "Ticket to Play" program.



If a child has done homework, behaved properly, and attended all classes, the child will have a Ticket to Play outside after school.

The program provides a behavioral management tool for both the teachers and house mothers. The ticket to play reinforces the concept of choice and accountability. The children are now accountable for doing their homework, speaking English in school, and their overall behavior. They have the choice to either play during play time or not, according to the choices they make regarding homework and behavior. Homework completion and behavior is recorded on the Ticket to Play which must be presented before going out to play.

The competition to have a perfect day is fierce! We will miss these two very talented and energetic young people!