



NEWS FROM HOINA HOMES OF THE INDIAN NATION

PO Box 87, St. Charles, Missouri 63302 • www.hoina.org • May 2016



York College of Pennsylvania Students: L-R — Rachel Sweezy, Morgan Hoagland, Brie Dadich, Mary Kate Cree, Samantha McGuigan, Casey Hollopeter, Tori Azzaro, David Fyfe, Megan Deibel, Lyndsey Mitchum, Ashley McManus, Kylie Jones, Sarah Spina, Maddie Collins, Jess Huska, and Kari Rodenhauser

Filling Bellies With Joy

*by Casey Hollopeter
Student at York College of Pennsylvania*

I am a senior-level nursing student at York College of Pennsylvania. Over our winter break my professor and I, with 15 other students, traveled to India to visit HOINA. During our trip to India, we had the opportunity to travel to HOINA's Pondurangapuram property, which is home to their Grandma Lunch Program. When most people think of HOINA, they often think of the children and the organization as a whole that provides food, a home, and education to over 200 children.

However, most people are unaware of the Grandma Lunch Program that HOINA sponsors. In 2005, HOINA began providing a hot meal six days a week to a group of elderly women at one of HOINA's properties in a village that had its fishing industry decimated by the Tsunami of December 2004. From there, the Grandma Lunch Program was created in order to help ease the "burden" that many families felt by having to support their elderly relatives, especially when so many breadwinners had been lost or had lost their livelihoods in the tidal wave that hit India's east coast.

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Filling Bellies With Joy

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We took a day trip to Bapatla, and when we arrived at the village of Pondurangapuram, we filed from the bus to enter the chapel where we were to have the opportunity to serve lunch. As we entered the one-room building, we saw a room full of elderly women sitting crossed-legged in rows with silver trays at their feet. Upon our entering the church, many of the women greeted us with friendly handshakes and a traditional south Indian “Namaste.” Once we got into the church, lunch was brought in by a few of HOINA’s employees who are responsible for making and serving the lunches on a daily basis. We began collecting the women’s trays, and a few of us served the food while the others took turns passing out a well-balanced lunch to the ladies. Every single one of the women were so grateful to receive a meal and thanked us graciously as they began eating.

After we were finished serving the women, we were able to sit with them as they enjoyed their lunch. This was a very powerful moment for a lot of us where we were able to sit back and realize the impact of this program and how amazing it is that HOINA sponsors a program like this. After the women were finished eating, they went outside to wash their dishes and their hands. Many of them came back inside to talk with us. Although they did not speak a lot of English, it was not hard to understand what they were trying to say. Many of the women communicated with non-verbal communication including touching our faces, laughing, smiling, and cracking their knuckles on their heads, which we later learned meant that they thought we were beautiful! Most of all, we could just see it in the eyes of the women how happy they were that we were there and how grateful they were for the lunch that they received. HOINA’s manager, Anand, was able to translate one woman who stated, “You all have filled our bellies with



York College students serve at the Grandma Lunch Program.

joy,” referring to our presence during their lunch. That amazing opportunity “filled our bellies” with life lessons that we have taken hold of here at home. The grandmas’ gratitude translated into our own joy.

HOINA is a 501(c)3, tax-exempt organization with international headquarters located at:

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PO Box 87
Saint Charles, MO 63302-0087 U.S.A.

This newsletter is published to inform our readers of the work HOINA does among the handicapped and abandoned in India.

Edited by Letti L. Becker
Layout by Eberly Designs
Printing by Freedom-Graphics

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The official registration and financial information of Homes of the Indian Nation (HOINA) may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling, 1.717.787.1057. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Sisters Brighten a Dark Day

by Rachel Sweezy

Student at York College of Pennsylvania

To connect with someone you meet who touches your soul and makes you feel as if you have known them your whole life is a rare treat that I have enjoyed few times. When I left America to travel to HOINA, I expected to make new friends and meet some great people, but I was not fully prepared for what awaited me. How could I know that the excitement I was feeling on the flight to India, would be replaced on the flight home with the urge to turn around and stay at HOINA? I was surprised that somewhere so different would grow to feel like home to me, and the people in it, to become my family. What was even more surprising was the fact that a little nine-year-old could touch my heart so greatly, and make me miss her every day I am in the United States.

I met Sravanthi the second day I was at HOINA. My friend, Mary-Kate, and I were taking the children's lunches to them. We pulled up to the school and unpacked the silver tins filled with delicious food. One by one, children began to file out of the building into the little patio where we were setting up lunch. At first only about a dozen appeared, until suddenly we saw a herd of children running towards us. Dressed in their plaid uniforms, accompanied with big smiles, they quickly grabbed their tins and formed orderly groups to eat with their HOINA sisters and brothers. What began as chaos settled as the older girls were calm, cool, and collected and quickly distributed food and water to the younger children. Once everyone was situated, I took a seat on a bench and waited to see if anyone needed help. I was still shy because I hadn't really met anyone yet, and I wasn't sure if the kids wanted to talk while they ate. It wasn't long after I sat when the little ones tugged on my arm saying, "Sister, please come sit with us! Please!" Of course I did; how can you say no to those beautiful faces? With mouths full of food, they asked me every question they could think of. As I answered all their questions, I noticed a small girl in the back of the group quietly watching. I gave her a warm smile and asked if she'd like to sit next to me. That little invitation was all it took for her to open up, telling jokes and smiling, and filling me in on her day at school. When it was time to go she grabbed my hand and said, "Please don't forget me, Sister!"

From that day on she was my shadow. From morning prayer time until bedtime we played games, laughed, told stories, took silly pictures, and even managed to fit some homework in there, too. My favorite memories at HOINA



Rachel and HOINA girls perch on the playground's turtle.

include seeing her sleepy smile bright and early before school, wishing goodnight at bedtime, and all the moments in between that we shared.

Something I will never forget is how by the end of the trip Sravanthi was very perceptive when it came to how I was feeling. If I was just a little off that day, she knew it! My whole life I have dealt with anxiety and depression, and by the end of the trip I was feeling a little low. On one of the last nights, a big farewell program was planned where the children prepared dances and songs for us. I was not having a good day, so I planned to stay in my room for the evening. As dinner time approached, girl after girl ran to the guest house to show us their pretty dresses. Sravanthi came to the guest house and asked Mary-Kate where I was. Mary-Kate gently explained that I wasn't feeling well, but she'd she if she could get me to come out. I came to the guest house doors and saw Sravanthi's big smile, "Rachel sister! Look at my dress! It has purple—your favorite color!" When she ran over to hug me, she looked up, confused as to why my eyes were red and puffy. She put her hands around my face and said, "Don't cry, Sister. Tonight will be a happy time, and you will love my dance." How could I say no to that face? Her eyes were filled with love as she gave me a tight hug.

I quickly put on my sari and joined the rest of my sisters. The whole night was beautiful and heart-warming, and I would have missed it if I hadn't seen how much Sravanthi wanted me there. I couldn't let her down because that would have hurt more than whatever I was feeling. I am still amazed that after only three weeks this little girl could steal my heart and bring a smile to my face no matter what. I will never forget her and the light that she brought into my life.

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May 2016

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Say YES to Sponsoring this Sweet Face

Pavan Kumar's parents were married in 2003. His father was a truck driver. When his mother was pregnant they found out she was HIV positive. The doctors gave her medicine to protect her son, who was born on September 22, 2006. Pavan's father sent his wife and children out of the home, so the boy's mother worked as a house maid to try to support her children. When his father died in 2009, his mother became a Christian. She continues to take medication. Her church pastor suggested that she admit Pavan Kumar to HOINA. He came to us in July of 2015.

Pavan Kumar's favorite color is yellow. He likes dogs and playing on the swings. He would like to be a teacher when he grows up, and you can help him achieve that goal. Send your first gift of \$35 with the coupon above to our office.

