

<p><b>Letter from the President</b>  <i>The children finished their school year and get a month's break! Rising Star President Becky Douglas takes the time to answer your questions.</i></p>	<p><b>Volunteer Journal</b>  <i>Sarah Tempest shares her thoughts on her recent trip to India and what it meant to her.</i></p>	<p><b>Child Spotlight</b>  <i>Sathish, age 15, is the oldest and by far the strongest kid living at the Rising Star Hostel</i></p>	<p><b>S4 Wins BYU Venture Capitalism Title</b>  <i>S4 won the BYU competition with their business plan to have Rising Star Outreach Self-Sustainable within 5 years.</i></p>
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## President's Letter

*The children have all been working hard this last month to finish their school year. It ended the last of April. After a wonderful end of the year program for their parents, they took leave. Now they are all at home with their families for the month of May. They will be returning to school the beginning of June. Only one month vacation!*

It's a busy month for us. We will be preparing for all the new grades to be taught in next year. We are busy with the registration process to get our school registered as a Matriculation School. Basically, that's the next step for us. We've been operating in the past as a school under special license since we serve the under-privileged. But we're ready to go mainstream! The registration process is a bit involved and probably won't be completed until the start of school in 2009. In the meantime, we'll continue to operate under our current license.

We have a team coming to India to prepare for the busy volunteer summer months. This year our volunteer program will be run by Amy Antonelli, our incredible Executive Director. We are expecting more than 80 volunteers this summer. It will be a busy summer!

Rising Star will also be hosting the team from BYU that worked on our winning entry for the Marriott School of Business Social Venture

Contest. The team was directed by Rising Star's Sylvia Finlayson. They won \$25,000 for their submitted plan to help Rising Star become economically self-reliant within 5 years. The plan revolves around tapping into the booming humani-tourism market. It's a natural for us, since we already have over 100 volunteers/year come to work with us. The team will be staying in Chennai for six weeks



Volunteer Sarah Tempest poses with children and will be doing market research on the feasibility of the plan.

Our students love to receive emails from you! It becomes one of our biggest challenges, however. Since the students are still not fluent with English, they usually need someone to sit at the computer with them while they attempt

to answer your emails. This person needs to speak Tamil. Therein comes our challenge! It's difficult to find enough Tamil/English volunteers to help with this process. We've had several teams in place, but the amount of work quickly overwhelms them. We've had a tough time getting them to stay committed. So we have quite a backlog of emails. But we've recently put in a new team and system to help. We're hoping this time we'll be able to get through all the backlog. Thanks for your patience! Don't stop writing, just keep being patient! Our goal is to get four correspondences/year to a sponsor. With 140 children (who each have 3 sponsors), that's a lot of emails! Whew!

We get emails sometimes from our donors that remind us that not everyone knows our history and exactly how Rising Star Outreach works. While many of you have been with us for the last four years, many of you have come in recently. A recent email full of questions was received from Marje DeLong, one of our sponsors. I thought it might be helpful to answer her questions in the newsletter, in case some of the rest of you may have the same questions.

*Q: I thought Marriott built the school after you raised the money and bought the land?*

*A: The beautiful 13.5 acres that Rising Star owns outside of Chenglepet (about 1 1/2 hours southwest of Chennai) was bought by funds donated by the*

Sabin Children's Foundation. The first construction on the land, were the two children's homes. The homes house a total of 200 children. The girls' home is named the "Amber Douglas home for Girls" (named for my daughter who passed away). The boys' home is named the "Dick and Bill Marriott Home for Boys". The funds for these two homes were donated by two different foundations: the J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation, and the Richard E. and Nancy P. Marriott Foundation.

Q: Who are the Peery family?

A: The Peery Foundation built the new elementary school on the property. The foundation is funded by Richard Peery of Palo Alto, CA.

Q: The Dedication Service sounds fantastic. How do these children, who are given so much, learn to be independent?

A: The children are being trained everyday to become independent. First of all, each child washes and hangs up to dry his/her own uniform everyday. They each take turns at breakfast, lunch and dinner, both with cooking and clean-up. Each child is responsible for his/her own belongings. They each have chores every day (sweeping, mopping, working in the garden, etc.) The education they are receiving at the Peery School for Rising Stars, is preparing them to enter the job market at a top level.

Q: Have children left the school for higher learning since you became involved? What are they doing? What percentage are really helped? 100%? At what age do they graduate?

A: Our oldest child in the school is in 6th grade. The few older children have not been with us long enough to graduate. Normally a child graduates at 18, although our older children will be closer to 20, given the fact that they were so far behind in their studies. We expect to achieve 100% placement of our children in colleges, if they are interested. Hopefully, most will be interested. They are certainly being indoctrinated that way!

Q: Are these children also being taught the value of family so girls want to be mothers and boys husbands and fathers? This concept is rapidly disappearing from the world.

A: All the children are being prepared to be good mothers and fathers one day. They are being taught to respect each other. We are especially diligent about teaching the importance of respecting the girls' needs as well as the boys' needs. They are being taught that girls' dreams and goals are as important as the boys. They are taught to consider girl's feelings as well as the boys. These are concepts that are not generally developed in rural Indian society.

The children are having good marriage relationships modeled for them. They are learning that

abuse is not acceptable, either for spouses or for children. As they get older, they will have classes in child development and effective discipline. In the meantime they are learning these concepts by the way they are treated in both the children's homes and the school. Skills in conflict resolving are being taught. Communication skills are being taught. These are critical skills for a good marriage.

Q: What is the IT job market?

A: IT stands for Information Technology. The IT market is the communications and information technologies market: out-sourcing, computer software, hardware, programming, etc. Indian economics have recently been transformed by the international outsourcing business. Due to its high number of computer-literate graduates among the upper castes, India has become an excellent source of out-sourcing skills. Particularly in the South of India, out-sourcing has become a large industry. Most of the employers are multi-national companies.

This is really a window of golden opportunity for our children. In the past, even if our children received an excellent education, since they came from leprosy colonies, they would have had a difficult time actually getting a job, regardless of their skills. But the multi-national companies don't have any hesitations to hire an applicant from a lower caste—as long as they have the necessary skills to complete the job. The most desirable skills for out-sourcing jobs are 1) English, spoken with either an American or British accent and 2) computer skills.

The education at Rising Star focuses on both of these skills. Due to the high number of volunteers who come every year (more than 100 a year!), our children have the unique opportunity to be tutored in English skills by Americans. They have the rich opportunity to gain that coveted American accent!

As we mentioned in the last newsletter, we have more than 60 brand new computers coming into Rising Star school from various donors (including the Rotary Club, Dell Computers, Digital Alliance, and the Benjamin Foundation). We have recently been thrilled to have Melissa Mitchell join our team of teachers. She will be running the computer programs and labs at Rising Star. Melissa has spent years on the product development team for Intel. Talk about over-qualified! But she's going to be awesome! More on Melissa later.

Being able to go into the IT market will be a huge advantage to our children. Currently, outsourcers in Chennai earn more than 3 times as much as doctors do, and four times as much as top attorneys do! We couldn't have chosen a better time to start our school. It convinces us that God is helping us--the timing is just too perfect!

If any of you have other questions that we could answer, don't hesitate to contact us as [ahumphrey@risingstaroutreach.org](mailto:ahumphrey@risingstaroutreach.org).

We're trying to make room for 50-60 new students to join us in June. We'll need a lot of new sponsors! Please let your friends know about the wonderful experience of sponsoring a Rising Star student. Each sponsor is like a gift from God to the child. Your generous donations make it possible for these beautiful children to rise above the stigma and economic suffering of their parents. Your letters give encouragement. Your prayers give strength to our program. We can't thank you enough for your wonderful support!

Becky Douglas

## Volunteer Journal

I have been home just one week and since my return I have been trying to process all I have experienced in the last three months while living in India.

India, as a whole, is completely chaotic. The cities are unbelievably crowded and uncomfortable, the sights and smell often unbearable. Being a tourist for just a few weeks could make a person crazy, so I was especially grateful to experience India on a local level, living at the Rising Star Hostel in Thottanaval Village. I feel I was given the most real and raw experience I could have asked for.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to narrow down a few stories that can fully describe my life in India. Everyday was challenging, sometimes even frustrating, but what it came down to was the feeling of contentment and peace I had each night from being surrounded by the beautiful children at Rising Star.

The one thing I forgot to take to India was a watch, though it was never needed because every morning I awoke to the sweet sound of children singing at the top of their lungs. Some of my favorite memories are eating with all the children outside in one giant circle. I love how honest the kids are. There was no hesitation in letting me know I wasn't properly using my fingers while eating and that I needed to incorporate a little more Indian color and fashion into my boring American style. In no time, I ate with all five fingers, dyed my hair black, had bangles stacked up to my elbows, jingled with each step from the silver bells on my anklets, wore silk saris and flowers in my hair. I completely adopted the Indian style and for some reason, though I felt ridiculous at times, the children were never shy in telling me how "super" they thought I looked. Indian fashion seems to be based on the theory the brighter, the better. Poverty

permeates throughout the country, but never have I seen such beauty within poverty. Women pride themselves in looking beautiful, and I must say, they do a remarkable job, by miraculously wrapping themselves up in solid pieces of brightly colored fabrics.

When I first experienced the leprosy colonies, I remember initially feeling a sense of hopelessness. I couldn't help but focus on the gaping wounds of patients and the dire living conditions. Within the three months, however, my feeling had completely transformed. Through the weeks of visiting different colonies and seeing the love the parents showed their children at the monthly visits and special functions, I no longer focused on the debilitating effects of leprosy. I was able to embrace the families with compassion and form relationships with them. I especially loved the concept of the art school where those formerly labeled as "untouchables" were given the opportunity to not only find beauty within themselves, but also express and create that beauty in their works of art.

I regularly went running on the dirt roads surrounding the Rising Star property. I loved these moments because I literally never knew what I would run into. It could have been being chased by a flock of children trying to catch up to me to kiss my cheeks, running through goat herds, dodging duck herds, playing in local cricket games, seeing baby blessings or animal sacrifices. There was always something. One day a few of the volunteers ran to another local school a few miles away. As I walked through the dark, worn and dingy building, I couldn't help but feel depressed that this was an environment for children, let alone a place designated for teaching them. I was so grateful the children at Rising Star had a beautiful new building, full of light and color, inviting of a good education.

Compared to the American lifestyle, it may seem as though these children have little, but somehow I feel they gave me so much. I am grateful for my time I spent with these inspiring children and I truly believe their futures will be so much brighter with the opportunities Rising Star has and will continue to create for them.

### BYU MBA Student Volunteer

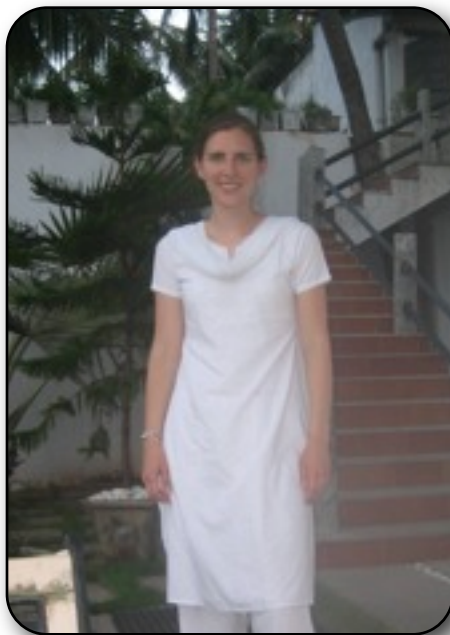
While a student at BYU, I heard Sylvia Finlayson speak to my social entrepreneurship class about Rising Star Outreach. I was immediately impressed. I decided to join the many volunteers that help run this organization by reaching out and educating the children of the leprosy affected. My time with RSO is short as I'm only here for a few weeks, but I've already been impressed with the efforts of all the staff

and volunteers.

There are always challenges that an organization faces as it starts to grow and expand its influence. Rising Star is no exception. However, I am struck by how RSO attracts some of the most intelligent and highly motivated people I know. RSO is overflowing with requests for volunteers, which is an indication that something wonderful is going on here. It has become a magnet to people searching for a way to make a tangible difference.

As we work in the Chennai area, I see how the business owners and local people respond to Rising Star staff. I see the respect and admiration they have for this organization and its leaders. Rising Star has been able to bring together many resources in this area. Although I came here to give of my time and resources, I have been given much more in return. I am rewarded by seeing a genuine smile, a humble handshake, and an energetic wave hello from an exuberant child.

### Child Spotlight



Sathish, age 15, is the oldest and by far the strongest kid living at the Rising Star Hostel. All the younger boys idolize Sathish because of his rippling muscles. They are constantly asking Sathish to flex for them—and he anything but shy of showing them off! Sathish has worked hard in developing his muscles. He is always the first to volunteer to carry the heavy supplies in and out of the school and hostel. Also, it is a rare occasion to see Sathish without a couple of the younger boys attached to and hanging from him. In March, on Sports Day, Sathish won more awards than anyone else. He is a natural athlete. He has confidence, strength and skill—not to mention unique style. On running days, Sathish loves

to sport his socks that come to his knees and his stark white boat shoes that were gifted to him.

Sathish came to Rising Star at a later age than most, so he has been working extremely hard in catching up on his English. He talks often of his sponsors and initiates writing and draw-



Sathish flexes his muscles

ing groups for other kids to communicate to their sponsors. Unlike most teenagers, Sathish loves hanging out with the younger kids. He sets a positive example for the others to follow. At the end of school Annual Day awards ceremony, Sathish was nominated for numerous awards, including most improved academically and for being the best helper in his hostel family, The Graces. Aside from his big appetite, Sathish has a very big heart and a great sense of humor.

### S4 Captures Venture Capitalism Title

Students for Self-sustainable Schools (S4), a group of 6 students partnered with Rising Star Outreach, competed in the annual BYU Social Venture Competition with their business plan aimed at making RSO's boarding school self-sustainable within 5 years. After countless hours of hard work, endless revisions, and numerous preliminary rounds, S4 presented to an elite group of judges and an auditorium full of students. S4 was selected as the winner of the Audience Choice contest and the overall winner as determined by the judges. The winnings amount to \$25,000 to be used for the purpose of implementing the program.

The plan includes the construction of a traditional hotel that will generate future streams of income from guests' room and board. Volunteer and Eco-Tourists are the first target market and future markets include students doing internships/studies abroad and corporations enjoying business retreats at the peaceful and relaxing property. The plan will leverage several key relationships RSO currently has. Based off of even the most conservative

estimates, it is poised to be a huge success. The team of students have paid for their own tickets and are coming to Rising Star Outreach this summer to further develop their plans and create a turn-key operation so that volunteers can immediately and effectively do their part while having a life-altering experience as they witness the miracle happening at RSO in Southern India.

The hotel will also serve as a training ground to the wonderful children at RSO. S4 is committed to not only creating a financially independent status for RSO's boarding school, but also to the students' acquisition of valuable vocational skills that will ensure they can readily gain employment upon graduation; this is where S4 will help RSO make the biggest difference. Together S4 and RSO hope to provide a future full of success and happiness for the beautiful children who are our inspiration.

### Cameras, Cameras, Cameras

As part of our healing through the arts program, we are hoping to start a photography class in one of our leprosy colonies.



Members of S4 pose for a congratulatory picture

As the lives of the leprosy-affected are changing through micro-businesses and through Rising Star's education program, we thought it would be very interesting to give the colonists the ability to document their lives and the changes that are occurring, through photography. As an additional bonus, to own a camera, is the beginnings of a small business. It's a great micro-business. With proper training, the photographers could take pictures of the weddings, the funerals, the new babies, etc.—all occurring within their colony. These are events that have not been documented in the past, because the patients have not had

enough money to hire professional photographers, and of course, none of them have cameras. Having pictures of the important events in your lives is also an expression of the importance of your life. This outlet could, in this way, also help with their sense of dignity.

So we are asking for donations of good quality digital cameras. Upgrade your own camera and send us your old one. Upgrade and uplift someone else!

If any of you camera buffs would like to participate in the photography classes, let us know.

[ahumphrey@risingstaroutreach.org](mailto:ahumphrey@risingstaroutreach.org). To read a fun story of a similar camera project in Africa, watch [http://darynkagan.demo.nimbussoftware.com/charity/stories/ch\\_080519\\_photographyforafrica.html](http://darynkagan.demo.nimbussoftware.com/charity/stories/ch_080519_photographyforafrica.html).

We also still need USB flash drives. Stick one in an envelope and send it to Rising Star Outreach, 6241 Indian River Dr, Norcross, GA 30092.