GIRLS FOR THE WORLD

Winter Update 2013

Girls for the World Circles Up in Hassan

"I WANT GIRLS TO LEARN HOW TO GO FROM [BEING IN THE] BACK TO THE FRONT LIKE I LEARNED IN THIS PROGRAM."

We spent ten days this fall at an orphanage and hostel run by the Salesian Sisters and supported by Homes of Hope India in Hassan District, India. There are 90 girls being cared for by four amazing Sisters.

Many of these girls have no one, and some of the girls who have families are not wanted by them. Several of them were found alone on the streets begging for survival. And those with families were living in circumstances so dire or dangerous they were brought here to be taken care of. Even grandmothers bring girls in to keep them safe from their fathers and other relatives.

Of those that have a home, many did not want to return for the upcoming holiday because of what they would face... days begging in the city or working 12 hours in the hot sun of the rice fields were two reasons they feared leaving the hostel.

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Spotlight On: Mehrunissa

Mehrunissa grew up in a poor slum area in India. In a state that is legally dry, she was an alcohol runner for her family and became addicted to tobacco at a very young age. We asked her to attend our workshop last fall, but told her she had to be clean, taking a daily bath and staying away from tobacco. When she arrived, she was very quiet and hesitant to interact with the other girls. Although she participated in our circle, she stayed mostly to herself and hid the supplies we gave her: a diary, some stickers, etc., so no one would take them from her.

We gave Mehrunissa space, yet encouraged her participation in the activities. She loved learning about boundaries using the hula hoops and drawing pictures in her journal. She came to circle every day with a clean body and clean clothes.

On the final day of the workshop, we took turns standing in front of the group with our makeshift microphone and shared our "takeaway" from the workshop. Mehrunissa stood tall and, in a loud voice, explained that she was going home to teach her family everything she had learned. And she exclaimed, "I am a teacher! I am a teacher! I am a teacher."

And this year, at age 16, Mehrunissa started school for the first time… She's in first grade.

Mehrunissa lives in this community.

Laurel School

GFW conducted our second four-day workshop with Laurel School in Shaker Heights, Ohio. The girls were excited to begin the school year learning about themselves, their classmates, and girls around the world. And the teachers were grateful for our community-building activities! This rite of passage will extend to five days next year!

Nicaragua

This week, GFW is traveling to Nicaragua with a group of Cleveland-area Rotarians to meet with and distribute holiday gifts to a number of schools in Managua, including the School of the Dumps. We are exploring the possibility of conducting workshops in the area.

In this country of 5.8 million people, one of the poorest in Latin America, there were 1.3 million births in the public health system in the last 10 years. Of that total, 367,095 births were to girls and adolescents, including 172,535 to girls under the age of 14, according to a Health Ministry statistical report covering the period 2000-2010, as reported on the Inter Press News Service Agency website on 12/3/13. Visit **bit.ly/ipsnews** to read the article.

We're on YouTube!!!

Follow the link below to see our first "Girls for the World" video created by Alianza Arkana after our workshop in Peru last February. We will return this February for additional workshops. Check it out at **bit.ly/GFW-YouTube**.

"OUR DREAMS CAME TRUE"

FOR OUR FOLLOW-UP WORK IN ONE OF THE COMMUNITIES IN INDIA, WE INVITED FORMER PARTICIPANTS TO JOIN US FOR A DAY OF FUN, WHICH INCLUDED PRACTICING OUR SPEAKING SKILLS BY SHARING UPDATES WITH ONE ANOTHER AND TAKING TURNS LEADING THE CIRCLE IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES.

TO THE GIRLS' SURPRISE, WE RENTED "SWIMMING COSTUMES" AND TOOK THEM SWIMMING. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME FOR ALL 45 GIRLS AND MOTHERS!

GFW Circles Up in Hassan *(continued from cover)*

Their days are incredibly structured, as is necessary with so many girls! The girls awaken to the clap of the Sisters' hands at 5 a.m., the village church begins to play music over the loud speaker at 5:30, and they study till prayer begins at 6, then mass at 6:30. The girls come back from church to do their "duty" (their chores), and have breakfast. They study for another half hour and school begins at 9. I'm tired already and it's only 9 am! :) Bath times are scheduled, as are laundry time, study time, free time, meals, and bedtime. I walk through the halls with no fewer than 6 or 7 girls around me all talking at once! The cacophony of girls' voices resonates through the building.

Many of these girls have no one, and some of the girls who have families are not wanted by them.

The Sisters asked me to work with all the high school age girls, but it was actually too large a group to work with, as the needs of the girls are so great, the baggage they carry so heavy.

We are happy to report that the girls had a WONDERFUL experience in our less structured, interactive, and experiential program. We initiated our circle of 26 high school girls with a beautiful ritual, and we began an exploration into what a "circle" represents: equality, inclusiveness, interdependence, mutual support, the sharing of leadership and responsibility, and sanctuary, among other things. We discussed the circles to which we belong, our roles, and labels we have been given within those circles – labels such as dirty, worthless, and something not wanted.

We moved beyond our roles and labels, broadened our perspectives, and discerned the gifts we were given, those special talents we have, and their value to the world. And we painted symbols of them on a 12 foot long canvas to show the uniqueness of our gifts and the richness of our circle community. We sang and danced to learn new concepts, and practiced using our voices to discover who we are at a deeper level and the inherent dignity and beauty that lies within all of us.

We meditated to beautiful music and the girls loved it! It was so funny… we scheduled meditation for early afternoon and suggested everyone grab their blankets to lay on the floor. They were so excited! It was a whole new experience for them, and, as planned, gave some of the girls a chance to sleep for a half hour… what a luxury for them!

We spent our days learning from one another and sharing our stories. We practiced the dance of leading and following, learning to respect the needs of those around us and our own, too. We continued to practice speaking, and with every opportunity, the girls became more reflective and confident in their abilities and their sharing.

The younger ones were not to be left out of a GFW experience, as they insisted I work with them, too. These 36 young girls wanted to meditate so they could bring their blankets into the party like the big girls! Virtually all fell asleep, and I let them rest for about a half hour. Very sweet and much needed. Since they are learning English, I taught them a song that was written by a five-year old Cleveland girl called "Life is Beautiful."

We enjoyed sharing our stories and acting out our emotions and feelings, playing games around that theme. We discussed who sits at our tables of support and how we access the help we need. As I did with the older girls, we created poems called "I Am A Girl…" and decorated them with drawings and stickers, defining our identities according to our newfound self-awareness.

It was a powerful experience for all of us. The Sisters and Homes of Hope India have asked us to come back to conduct additional workshops for the girls and for those who will be working with them.

Karen Hanson, Executive Director

Girls for the World is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping adolescent girls envision themselves as powerful agents of change in their lives and communities.

Help make a difference!

Your tax-deductible donation will help change a young woman's life with the remarkable transformation that comes as a result of knowing, loving and trusting oneself. Thank you for your generous support of our work!

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