

You've heard a lot about Sawmi. She's the Angels' Place super star who won the hearts of everyone who ever met her including Bill and MaryKay Minsker who made it possible for Sawmi to come to the USA to attend college. Here, in her own words, is a letter from Sawmi who is now in her second year at Ohio Valley University. Culturally and academically it has not been easy, but she recognizes the unique opportunity she has been given and she remains the determined young lady we welcomed to Angels' Place in 2005 when she was only 9 years old.

Hello! I am so grateful to everyone who have contributed and provide the opportunity to come to America and do my degree. Especially I would like to thank Papa Bill and Nunu MaryKay Minsker for taking care of me like their own.

Coming here first I was thinking of pursuing Social Work degree at Ohio Valley University. But unfortunately the college did not offer a direct course for it so I end up taking Humanities for the first semester. Then I developed interest in Psychology through some of my professors and colleagues. After finishing my first semester I changed my degree to Psychology. I am really happy with the exposer that I get here with different kinds of degree unlike where I come from Churachandpur. But I still have a problem with selecting my minor either business or education because I am not sure.

Studying in a foreign land was like a dream to me. Having been here already more than a year I have come across different kinds of problems and troubles in college. I have faced a lot of challenges regarding my studies and people, like the language barrier. I am glad people are willing to help me.

Since I am not fluent with English I struggle most with my English class. Having come this far and studying here make me become an introvert person which I was not at all back in India. I always tried my best to be the most useful person to everyone, but coming here sometime I feel like no body understand me at college.

That make me scared to walk out of my comfort zone that is my dorm. I really miss my boyfriend and my friends back in India who understand what is good or bad about me.

I am so happy to have the chance to travel around the country and last summer I was so happy to get the chance to visit India to see my brothers and sisters at Angels' Place in Churachandpur. Being able to see my relatives and boyfriend was so nice. Going there make me realize how life is really unpredictable and how uncertain it is what tomorrow will bring to us. I came to realize how important every little moment in life is being with our loved ones. Working there at the orphanage and coming this far with God's blessing, I tried my best to show how important life and every human is no matter what our background and who we are in life. Telling them what matters most is to have God, being patience with life circumstances and stay obedience. I assured them that every step I accomplished is from God, and it can be for every one of them if they are striving with good intention because God knows every single thought we have even though we make mistakes all the time. He will help anyone no matter what.

I want to move on with my studies and life. I don't want to regret later leaving my studies here and going back because of the culture difference, weather and even friends. All these things are not my main problems anymore because I always believe that no matter where I go, God is always there to accompanying me. Even though it is hard, I have a peace of mind.

Once again thank you so much to everyone for the love and prayers.

Love and Peace,

Sawmi Sektak



The children at Angels' Place look up to Sawmi with love and respect. After all of these years, the home can tell many success stories.

## Advancing Vocational Education at Angels' Place

A critical part of the James Connection mission is to prepare children at Angels' Place for a productive life after the orphanage. Sponsorship dollars provide each child with a good education through our partnership with local private Christian schools. As they look to the future, the children have many choices, some exploring higher education and others looking to work with their hands.

Over the course of this year, we have been working to create opportunities in vocational education for the children of Angels' Place. Jim Ice, a board member who has visited Angles' Place four times, is leading the effort to create local partnerships and develop programs that teach marketable vocational skills. Jim is applying his experience in adult education and his PhD in education to this initiative. During his visit to India last March, he, Jan Swensen, and the local team in India shaped a plan for vocational education and there is great progress to report.

The Board of Directors approved the hiring of Ms. Ashley Lhaineiphal Tonsing as Career Coordinator for Angels' Place. She will identify vocational programs that build marketable skills, oversee the implementation of these programs, and educate the children about career opportunities in the region. Tonsing brings both experience and energy to this critical new role (see related article) and has already created a plan for implementation of vocational education.

Tailoring was identified as the first vocational program to be introduced. In India it is still very common for local merchants to hand tailor clothes and sell them at local community markets. Additionally, experience in tailoring provides opportunity for employment by regional producers. A local tailoring instructor was identified and 20 children were selected to be part of the first group which started with an orientation session July 30<sup>th</sup>. Students started by learning to cut paper patterns and being taught the fundamentals of sewing, materials, pattern design, and tailoring. The children are excited to have this new opportunity and are already showing off their handiwork.

Two other vocational programs have been identified: culinary training and bookkeeping. We will launch the first year with these three programs, assess progress, and then explore future program options.

The cost of these vocational programs is not included in the sponsorship donations. Ashley has created a budget that includes: costs of equipment, instructors, materials, and career resources. Our objective is to raise \$28,000 to support this initial phase of vocational training. The Board of Directors believes that this investment will help prepare these precious children for success in life after Angels' Place.



Left: The first vocational-ed program at Angels' Place is sewing in preparation for a job in tailoring. The students start by learning to measure, design, and create patterns that they cut out and sew first of newspaper and later with fabric. Center: Organizing, expanding and upgrading the library facilities was high on Ashley Tonsing's list of things to do. Right: Many of our students are interested in mechanical repair – here one of our young men learns how to repair a sewing machine.

## Ashley Lhaineiphal Tonsing Hired As Career Coordinator

by Jim Ice – Board of Directors, US Lead for Vocational Education at Angels' Place

We are delighted to announce the selection of the new Career Coordinator to implement our plans for vocational education at Angels' Place. When we decided to expand educational opportunities to include vocational training, we needed to find someone with the experience and passion to lead this effort. R. Sanga and his team considered several candidates and selected Ashley Lhaineiphal Tonsing. Ashley lives in a community near Angels' Place and brings to this role experience in career and community development. She holds a masters degree in counseling and has an impressive background in both teaching and counseling. Her experience includes tutoring children and teaching children's bible classes at church, and her love for children is combined with the professionalism and discipline necessary to achieve our program goals. This position will have her on site at Angels' Place most days, where she will oversee the vocational program and provide social and career guidance. She works under the direction of the Superintendent and produces a monthly status report for the team in the USA. We are extremely pleased with Ashley and recognize her as another way God continues to bless this ministry of service to children. Please pray for Ashley and all the staff of Angels' Place.



## Lemongrass Oil Venture is in the Black

We have been growing lemongrass and extracting its oil for years. We now have over 500 acres under cultivation producing a high quality oil. But for years we have only been able to market it to local brokers who pay us bottom rupee.

Finally, we secured an export license and immediately began a world-wide search for international buyers. We found doTerra - a wonderful partner that deals in all types of essential oils. DoTerra is headquartered in Utah. Maybe you have heard of it or bought its products.

They have agreed to buy all of our oil production. We delivered over 1000 kilos last year and have just delivered another shipment of over 1000 kilos. Because doTerra has agreed to pay us top dollar, with this latest sale we finally have passed into the black on our investment.

Nevertheless, we have encountered one more snag in this venture. As you know we operate in Northeast India, a remote region that has very little manufacturing and very little in support of marketing. We have found it difficult to get industrially acceptable containers for our oil. We have been using the generic plastic drums that hold about 50 gallons, but these drums can contaminate the oil and make it unusable for retail sale. Consequently, we must obtain containers from outside Northeast India for future sales, and, thankfully, doTerra, is helping us locate and procure the necessary better containers.

I want to commend doTerra to you. Although it is a for-profit company its employees make a special effort to work with producers who do charitable work. Before dealing with us, doTerra visited Angels' Place to evaluate the operation first-hand and praised us for our work with kids. In a recent exchange, Jared Moon (our agent at doTerra) wrote, "It is a pleasure to be a small part of the wonderful work that you are all doing for the kids at Angels' Place. We look forward to engaging more to ensure that it is a sustainable project for all of you."

Surely, God has blessed this partnership.



Some of the older children who express interest can gain valuable skills and experience when they help harvest lemongrass in the field, transport it to the distillery, and process the oil for packaging and distribution.

## SPOTLIGHT ON VOLUNTEERS:

Meet Bill and MaryKay Minsker. Bill and MaryKay first heard about the James Connection at a presentation by Jan Swensen at the Bridgeport Church of Christ where they attended primarily before moving to South Carolina. Bill also knew Jan through their work together on the Ohio Valley University Board of Directors. With an already blended family of adult children, the Minskers didn't hesitate to add, not one, but several to their family as they took up sponsorship of five children at Angels' Place. MaryKay said, "We joked that there were his and hers and now these are our first kids together."



It wasn't long before Bill decided he needed to see for himself this orphanage called Angels' Place, and he booked a trip with Jan in winter of 2016. Bill was astounded by the operation there.....the sheer number of kids, the family atmosphere, the care by a small but loving staff, and the gratitude each child displays for just simply living at Angels' Place.

Bill returned from that trip declaring to MaryKay, "There must be something more we can do!" Together they decided to offer to bring the most promising student, Sawmi, to the states to attend college. "We knew this was going to be a huge undertaking for this young woman. We gave her as much information as we could as she wrestled with her decision and we reassured her we would be at her side the whole way." Sawmi is now a sophomore at OVU!

The Minskers have taken Sawmi into their family whole-heartedly. She spends holidays with their family and travels with them when school permits. Bill and MaryKay's own kids have embraced their international "sister" with enthusiasm and warmth.

Bill recently wrestled with the question, "What else can we do to help?" so he has taken the Angels' Place story on the road throughout West Virginia and South Carolina. Bill has made formal presentations at churches or he and MaryKay have simply told the story over supper with friends, but their passion for the ministry is palpable and contagious.

The James Connection has many new sponsors thanks to the Minskers. Please join us in saluting their dedication and willingness to keep asking, "What else can we do?"

*Editor's Note: If you would like Bill to speak to your congregation or civic group, please let us know by emailing [info@jamesconnection.org](mailto:info@jamesconnection.org).*

## Let's Get Green

Help us reduce costs of printing and postage by electing to receive our newsletter by email. Being on our email list also allows you to receive more frequent updates about breaking news at Angels' Place. Please email us at [info@jamesconnection.org](mailto:info@jamesconnection.org), put "ADD ME" in the subject line and specify in your message your name so we can add you to our growing email list. Thanks so much for recognizing that every few cents we save means more money for the kids!

## On the Web

[www.jamesconnection.org](http://www.jamesconnection.org)

Join our group on Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/JamesConnection>



## Why They Leave

We receive numerous inquiries asking why do children leave Angels' Place? There are several reasons, but the quick answer is that most of the children that leave have simply grown up and graduated either from 10<sup>th</sup> grade or 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Many of our kids are able to live with relatives and work part-time jobs that provide financial help and in some cases tuition to attend the local college.

Sadly, some of our children leave before reaching class ten or twelve. You may be a sponsor who has received the disappointing news that your youngster has unexpectedly left Angels' Place. How does that happen?

Our children always have the option to leave Angels' Place. They come to Angels' Place voluntarily at the request of their legal guardians. Sometimes an extended family reaches a point when its members are able and willing to support and nurture a destitute child, and the legal guardian requests to take back custody of the child. This area of India is very tribal, and tribes have a tradition of support of all tribal members. Even when our children leave as adults many return to their tribes where they will receive support. When a child leaves before adulthood our superintendent investigates the circumstances to which that child returns to make sure it is safe and secure. This is especially true for girls leaving sooner than expected.

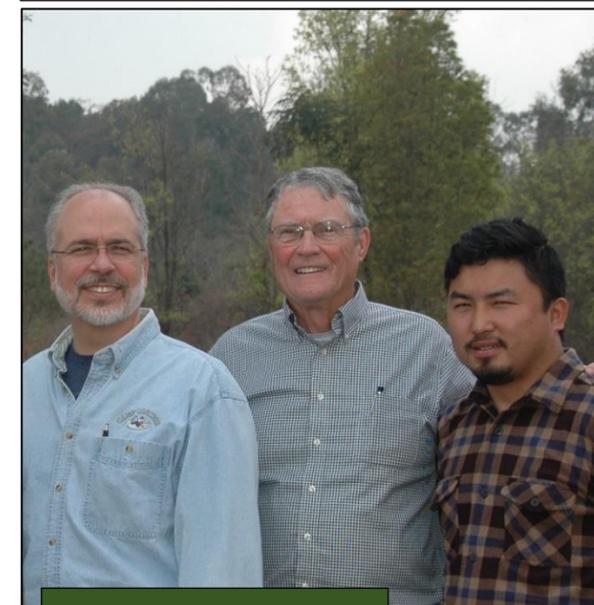
Unfortunately, there is another reason children leave. Sometimes they simply must be expelled. We know that kids will be kids and they may misbehave so we do not expel for simple misbehavior and we do not expel for the first offense. But we must protect the other children from danger and bad influences. We gladly retain a child who has learned his or her lesson; however, when a child will not behave and it threatens the group then we must expel the wrong-doer.

In addition, there may be a child with a physical or mental condition that we are not equipped to handle. Those children are best served by their greater families, their tribes and/or the services in their communities.

Fortunately, throughout the years we have not had to expel more than a few children, but we recognize that when we do, it is disappointing to their sponsors. If that happens to you, please don't hesitate to ask us about the departure of your child.



Evening fun on the basketball court. The boys' dormitory is in the background.



James Connection Board Member and Vocational Education Chair Dr. Jim Ice (left), Executive Director Jan Swensen (center) and Angels' Place Assistant Supervisor Siam Laingek (right)



Round one of the recent spelling bee.

YES! I would like to offer my support for the children at **Angels' Place!**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ to support the vocational education program.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ as a year-end gift to be used as needed.

I want to sponsor a child for \$35 per month.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

New sponsors: we will mail you a sponsorship form or you can download and mail one from our website: [www.jamesconnection.org](http://www.jamesconnection.org)

Please send donation or sponsorship forms to:

**James Connection PO Box 751 Monroeville, PA 15146**



These girls work in the kitchen sifting rice to make sure there are no foreign items in it. They shake the basket and then inspect the rice to see if they should pick out any dark spots.