

VOLUNTEERING AT THE CHINA CARE HOME-- DAY 6, SUMMER 2010

July 16, 2010

Day 6- A Visit by LiAnn Ishizuka

Walking along the sidewalk, I spot a typical apartment building squished into Beijing's bustling city. It surprises me that the China Care Home would be located in what looks like another high rise.

But everything I envisioned from the outside completely disappears when I enter the building's second floor. The ten apartment units have been transformed into family housing units and special care units where children with special needs from state-run welfare institutions all over China are sent for medical care.

I quickly learn that the location of this special Home is ideal because it is less than three miles from Beijing Hospital, providing easy access for on-call medical attention for the most at-risk babies.

As Katerina, China Care's volunteer coordinator, gives me a tour, she opens the door of each housing unit and I hear a friendly voice greet me with "Ni hao!" The live-in staff, each appropriately named "Mama" and wearing yellow-collared shirts, are cradling the infants and calling me to play with the children.

One of the first units I visit is the one where one-year-old Jian is sitting on the foam mat. His size does not match his age because he suffers from a tumor on his right side making his head and ear larger on that side. While I play with him, I notice how alert and attentive he is and not his outward deformities. His huge smile and curious eyes are the only things I see.

In another room is Li. Katerina asks me to guess her age. Li is very small, and I guess she looks not much older than nine months old. Katerina shakes her head and tells me that Li is nearly three years old. She was born with a very severe cleft lip and palate, which impeded her feeding for the vital first few years of her life, which is why she is much smaller than most children her age.

Even though she is recovering from recent cleft surgeries, Li is nevertheless very active and very smart. She reaches for my white wristwatch that lights up and the China Care beaded bracelet I am wearing. Her hair sticks up straight and her huge eyes stare back at me with a sense of wonder.

I only visit the China Care Home for the morning and afternoon, but I immediately feel the connection volunteers and staff experience on a daily basis. Everything from the spunkiness in some of the toddler's voices when they sing aloud, to the contagious laughter of the children with cerebral palsy, remain priceless memories I know I will always remember.

I visited the China Care Home as a China Care Bruins club member alumnus, who helped fundraise for surgeries for children I only knew from donor reports. Being in the China Care Home and interacting with the kids, even for just one day, meant so much more and it made me so proud to have been part of this organization throughout my four years in college.

I am so touched by the work of the staff and by the smiles of the children. I leave the China Care Home with a visual insight of what it means to make a real difference in the life of a single child - it is something that even words cannot fully describe - it is pure love.

