Student Spotlight: Nisitha Sengottuvel

Who She Is:
Nisitha Sengottuvel is a second-year Honors student and Neuroscience major (though she is planning to switch to Molecular Genetics) who absolutely loves people. She is passionate about being around them and helping those who need it. She says, “Abe Lincoln said you can learn a lot about a man by what makes him angry, and I’ve realized lack of equal opportunities is what makes me angry.” Inequality of any kind is something she seeks to combat.

What She Does:
Sengottuvel’s dedication to other people is evident in her hobbies; she does a variety of volunteer work including art therapy and working at a food pantry. She has even helped out at an orphanage in Nepal. At OSU, she is the fundraising coordinator for the Association for India’s Development (Columbus Chapter) and the president of Inspiration through Communication Education. She is also part of the Honors Collegium.

How She Got Involved with Clinton Global Initiative University:
Sengottuvel applied last year and enjoyed the conference and her attempt to implement her commitment. She had heard about the corruption, trafficking, and poverty in countries like Nepal, but these were only statistics to her until she spent three weeks at the Light for Nepal's Children Orphanage. With few exceptions, she lived like an orphan (even losing fifteen pounds during the trip). She nurtured them, took them to school, and taught them hygiene, games, songs, and dances. In turn, she was able to learn about Nepal’s government, economy, social system, etc. through her interactions with the people there. She describes the orphans as “inspiring,” noting that helping at an orphanage goes far beyond simply feeding and learning the basics about the them. “What I want to do so badly is to drill into [people’s] minds every talent, every act of maturity, every smile, every pout, every laugh, every song and every dance that belong to the children,” she says. Sengottuvel gained a Nepali sister (mithini) through a ceremony when a friend of the orphans asked to become a sister to her. She also recalls the story of Sudip, who told her that his mother had been run over. “How are you supposed to respond when a child asks you if he could call you mommy because his was run over by a truck? I responded with a hug and a kiss.”

Her Commitment to Action:
She seeks to combat child labor in rural Nepal by targeting one of its major causes, the youth’s lack of education. Many children never receive any formal education, and others are forced to drop out of school at a young age to support their families, at which point it is difficult for them to become reintegrated into the traditional school system later on. Sabaila School seeks to provide these economically disadvantaged children with an opportunity to learn. (Sabaila means “everyone” in Nepali.) There are no upfront costs for attending, and the women trained by Sabaila will hold classes at times convenient for the children (probably evenings a few times a week, as long as it adds up to a minimum of five hours per week) so the children can still support their families if necessary. Sabaila will sponsor the tutors’ education and arrange for the logistics of holding classes. In return for educating the children, tutors will be eligible to receive gifts from the children’s families (although the families will not have to pay tuition.) In summary, “Sabaila aims to inspire community members to promote and accept education as a promising and viable pathway to economic and societal competence.”