



Hot, humid today. High, 90
Mild, showers tonight. Low, 63.
FORECAST, D-8

METRO EDITION

A special Angel brings hope to ill toddler

■ Angel Planes Inc., a locally-based charity founded by two teen brothers, arranged to fly girl and her family from India to Baltimore so she could receive specialized treatment for complications after a bone-marrow transplant.

By **JENNIFER LEVITZ**
Journal Staff Writer

Sick from a bone-marrow transplant gone wrong, toddler Anusha Lihala needed a wing and a prayer. Help awaited her, but it was at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, thousands of miles away from her home in Calcutta, India.

Angel Planes Incorporated, a Providence-based charity founded by two students, provided the wings, and probably, a lot of prayers, too.

Angel's volunteer pilots use their own planes, or the charity arranges for free air transportation for sick children and their families who cannot afford to fly to hospitals or medical centers for treatment.

Last year, for example, Angel Planes flew Natasha Puerta, the Central Falls girl who needed an intestinal transplant, to Nebraska for the operation. Natasha later died.

Angel Planes raises money for the trips with projects such as a November "Superwalk," a walk-athon in which 500 people raised \$50,000.

On Wednesday, after 87 electronic mail messages between Johns Hopkins, the Lihala family, and Angel Planes, little Anusha, who is 3, her sister, and her parents arrived at Dulles Airport outside Washington, D.C.

Matthew St. Peter, a Moses Brown School junior who founded the organization with his brother Chris, was there.

PROVIDENCE

"It made me feel wonderful," Matthew said.

Anusha received a bone-marrow transplant months ago to treat a genetic disorder. When the transplant began to fail, doctors at Johns Hopkins, which has had success in treating this particular type of "graft vs. host" disease offered to provide free medical care and accommodations for the family.

But Sudhir Lihala, Anusha's father, wrote Johns Hopkins that he could not afford to bring his daughter to the United States. The cost of the bone-marrow transplant had been too great a strain.

When a social worker from Johns Hopkins found the Angel Planes Website, with its "Kids Helping Kids" mission statement, she sent Matthew St. Peter an e-mail. Could Angel Planes cover the round-trip flight between Calcutta and Baltimore?

Matthew went to his father, lawyer Gary St. Peter, and said: "Isn't this what our Superwalk Sundays were for in the first place, to raise money to help with life-or-death situations like this?"

During the last three weeks, the hospital, Angel Planes and the Lihala family arranged for the trip.

Matthew and his mother, Janice St. Peter, and Matthew's community service advisor from Moses Brown, Teresa Andrews, were at Dulles when the family arrived at 3:30 p.m. on British Airways after a 26-hour flight that included a layover in London. Anusha was swollen, and her face was mottled.

The St. Peters took the Lihala family to a special home in Baltimore for families of the children receiving treatment at Johns Hopkins. At

last word, over the weekend, the girl's medicines were to be changed, and she was to be reevaluated today.

The Lihalas brought picture frames and candy from India for their new friends.

"We didn't want anything," said Janice St. Peter, "the joy you receive from helping is rewarding enough."

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: The St. Peters and Lihalas together in Baltimore.

