The Home of Blessings

Katrin Fiedler

"Hello, hello!" a choir of young voices greets Amity's group of visitors. The boys and girls are visibly excited, moving restlessly around. "Let's start, let's start" a tall boy urges the rest of the group, and all of them burst into the "ABC song" to welcome their guests.

This is the Home of Blessings, a day care centre for young people with mental handicaps. Currently, nine boys and girls aged between 16 and 25 attend the centre as daily visitors. The home, located on premises that were given to Amity by the Hong Kong Yang Memorial Service Centre, consists of two flats remodelled to the needs of the group. Communal facilities such as living room, computer room, kitchen and even two bedrooms enable inhabitants to share a family-style life including both recreational and educational elements. "Right now, we use the bedrooms only for our lunchtime nap, but we hope to be able to offer round-the-clock service to relieve parents in emergency situations at some time in the future," explains Guo Lili, senior staff of the centre.

Nine out of sixteen thousand

For the home's clients, every day starts with a stroll in the park. "Some of them need the exercise for rehabilitation purposes," explains Guo. The youngsters also receive training in life skills such as shopping, outing and visiting. Most of them can come alone to the home, but some have to be brought by parents or staff. "Their abilities differ widely - some of them are very independent, while others need help, for example during mealtimes," Guo Lili introduces some of the girls and boys. Apart from the general training offered to the whole group, each of them receives two sessions of individual coaching per week.

The home was partly created on initiative of some Nanjing parents who
felt the need for a day care facility for their handicapped children once the teenagers had graduated from Special Education School. In Nanjing alone, the number of young people with mental disabilities is estimated to be more than 16,000, but adequate facilities are lacking. Again Guo: “This means that many young people end up staying at home, being not properly looked after and feeling bored while their family members are out for work.”

It is not only the young clients themselves that profit from the home; but also their wider families. Being able to give their offspring into a professional day care provides some relief for family members who often feel overwhelmed by the burden of having to look after their grown-up children. “Before Chen Xiaolei came into the home, his parents would quarrel a lot because of him. Now, the situation is much better,” Guo Lili points out the boy who so enthusiastically greeted the guests upon their arrival. Chen Xiaolei, a friendly and cheerful 16-year-old, is extremely active and needs almost constant staff attention. Parents also meet regularly in a support group to share experiences and form bonds of mutual support.

**A new form of initiative for Amity**

The Home of Blessings is one of Amity’s latest ventures, opened in April of 2002. As a legally separate entity, it marks a new form of initiative from the foundation. Amity staff helped in setting up the home, which is registered as an independent charity, and still continue to supervise it in major decisions. At the same time, day-to-day running of the home lies in the hands of qualified staff.

Guo Lili, senior staff of the centre, came to her present job through a number of coincidences. “I don’t have any formal training in special education, but I used to work as a supervisor in a factory that employed handicapped people. In fact, those workers were suffering from physical handicaps, while our current clients are young people with mental disabilities. However, a number of problems in working with these people are the same. Some of them lack confidence, for example, or they don’t receive the same respect ordinary people do. At the same time, their thinking doesn’t follow the hierarchical rules of some fully abled people.”

Guo is assisted by three young graduates with degrees in special education and social work. Besides, the mother of one of the boys comes in on a part-time basis to do the cooking. With a staff-to-client ratio of one to two, the home is very well equipped personnel-wise, but financing the staff remains a big problem. “Currently, our young staff members receive only a fraction of what they would earn elsewhere, and we are concerned that this will create a problem of staff stability in the future. The home received a starting capital for one year from Amity, but then we will have to fend on our own. We are working hard to find solutions,” explains Tan Liying, who overseas the home from Amity’s side and functions as director.

“As of September, we will have to raise the monthly parental contribution to 290 RMB [US$ 36 approx.],” Tan continues. “Some of the parents actually wanted to withdraw their children from the centre because of financial reasons. But the young people like it so very much that they insisted in continuing to come. Here, they make friends and receive some training. At home, they would just sit around.” The young people’s smiles are proof enough of their support.
Looking Back, Looking Ahead - Excerpts from A Report Given To Amity’s European Partners

Zhang Liwei

The following report was given at the June 2002 ENAP meeting in Dublin. ENAP, the European Network of Amity Partners, is a loose network aimed at coordinating Amity’s cooperation with its European donor agencies. Zhang Liwei, Amity’s assistant to the General Secretary, started his report with an overview of China’s social and economic development in 2001, followed by highlights of Amity’s project work in 2001 and an outlook for the future.

Social and economic development in 2001

A series of important events in 2001 not only promoted the further opening-up and reform in China, but boosted the morale of the whole nation: winning the bid for the 2008 Olympic Games, hosting the APEC meeting in Shanghai in October 2001, and finally accession into the WTO. At the same time, China continued with domestic reforms in the areas of social security, economic policies, the household management system and more. As a whole, the country enjoyed political stability while there was also random social unrest. In particular in the countryside, farmers suffering from a burden of heavy taxation took to demonstrations against such policies.

Major problems in social development

While many China experts marvel at China’s “economic wonder” over the past 20 years, it has also riddled China with huge inequalities. Today, China is a country with “four worlds,” in which the richest segment of society accounts for only 2.2% of the population, while half of the country’s population still have to make do with low incomes.

Another source of inequality is the clear-cut demarcation between rural and urban areas regarding public services. The Chinese system of household registration (hukou) as either rural or urban carries wide-ranging implications for education, employment, public services and public expenditure. For example, China’s rural population accounts for two thirds of the whole population while the central government only spends one seventh to one tenth of its tax revenue in the rural areas. This is a deciding factor in creating the existing gap between rural and urban areas, in particular in access to public services.

The poorest segment of Chinese society, around four percent of both the rural and the urban population, continues to struggle with poverty. Laid-off workers, retirees, workers in poorly-run enterprises, the jobless, poor farmers, migrant workers and teachers in poorer areas are among those worst affected. The emergence of “socially disadvantaged groups” in socialist China is one source of concern for observers. They view this rapid social stratification as a possible cause of social unrest and also as a threat to the foundations of classic communism.

Corruption and environmental degradation are two other major ills that continue to hamper China’s development.
Highlights of Amity’s project work in 2001

Amity’s project work continued to grow and expand in 2001. The foundation was able to raise about 7 million US$, which was the largest sum ever in Amity’s 16 years of history. (For details, please see Annual Report 2001).

Amity continued its move westward and almost all of the project divisions opened up new project sites in the western provinces. The Teachers Project was finally able to make a small step further by placing teachers in Shanxi and Inner Mongolia to train middle school English teachers.

With regard to urban poverty, the support for migrant children’s schools was expanded to five schools, while retraining of laid-off women workers in Wuxi and Nanjing continued. As a pilot project, Amity initiated and worked with Nanjing Municipal Center for Legal Aid to provide free services for women and children to protect their basic rights. For Amity, this is a first step forward towards dealing with issues related to social justice.

Amity encourages local churches to participate in development work, and tries hard to raise funds for church-run social service projects. Many projects have made an impact on the local communities and more people are now turning to these church-run service centres to meet their needs. Amity has organized a wide variety of leadership training programmes, including training courses for the directors of church-run clinics, for staff of homes for the elderly, and for personnel of church-run kindergartens.

Organizational and staff development are always on top of Amity's agenda. To meet these needs, a workshop for Amity’s whole team was conducted in Nanjing. Additionally, staff members attended training courses and seminars both at home and abroad. Two Amity staff members are also on self-study programmes for second degrees.

Finally, significant progress was made in Amity’s efforts to raise the amount of funds raised locally, that is within China.

Priorities for 2002

Church-run projects. Apart from single church-run projects that will be continued, Amity will also try to do more community development projects in which both Christians and non-Christians are to be involved in project work.

Project management. Project management is the core of Amity’s work. Accordingly, Amity will focus on project management training and improve management skills of both Amity’s staff and project partners at all levels.

Organizational development. Amity will give special attention to the organizational structure and to staff development. Staff training through foreign experts invited to Nanjing and also through study visits abroad will be continued.

Promotion and fundraising. As part of Amity’s efforts to reach out to its home audience, a promotional video introducing Amity’s work will be produced. Experts will be invited to train Amity staff in fundraising and marketing skills. Finally, support groups are being built among suitable audiences such as university students. For example, Amity will organize college students to do volunteer teaching in some of the rural middle schools.
How has the cooperation with Amity changed over the years?
During the 1980s and early 1990s, support for Amity consisted mainly of support for Amity teachers. The UBCHEA supports funding teachers in cooperation with some church denominations in the USA. It also provides full funding for new teachers who want to take part in TESOL training at St. Michaels College prior to their assignments in China. Over the last 3 years, UBCHEA has been supporting the hiring of a recruiter for Amity teachers, targeting the college-age population in the USA.

In recent years, the scope of UBCHEA’s cooperation with Amity has expanded and diversified to other areas besides the Teachers Program. It is now providing scholarships for Chinese faculty who wish to complete a Masters degree in Amity-related universities and colleges. Chinese faculty can study for their MAs in major universities in China.

Leadership development has been another area of cooperation. In Fall 2001, there was training for college presidents of Amity-related colleges. A delegation of around 20 Chinese college presidents went to the USA for seminars on university management, visiting different colleges and universities. It was a valuable experience. I would like to say that leadership development includes training librarians, counselors and other professional staff, not just college presidents.

What are your reflections on working with Amity?
There are many positive things about working with Amity. Since there is no Christian higher education in China to speak of, UBCHEA can work, through Amity, to support the development of China. Working with Amity is a way of reaching out to schools with the most need.

In addition, Amity is very interested in south-south exchange, which UBCHEA calls inter-Asian linkages and network exchange. We have common interests in this area. UB supported two Chinese teachers of English to train at Silliman University in the Philippines. It has sent Chinese teachers to Payap University in Chiangmai, Thailand. There are plans to send teachers to Assumption College in Bangkok in the near future.

Amity is the only non-governmental organization that the UBCHEA works with in China. I find it has an excellent staff that is very efficient. I personally enjoy getting to know the staff and we have a close working relationship. Working in cooperation with Amity has been a privilege for me.

It has been good to see how Amity has evolved over the years. When I was an Amity teacher, the orientation was only 4 days long. Now, Amity’s Nantong Teachers Orientation Program (which lasts a month) has developed so much!

Besides Amity, UBCHEA also works
Defying Heat, Delighting Peasants
Amity Mobile Medical Team Visits Northern Jiangsu

He Congpei

It is July 25, 2002, a sunny day. And a hot day. At three o'clock in the afternoon, the sun is still burning strong. A white van is going at fast speed on the highway from Nanjing to northern Jiangsu. Outside on the van the Chinese characters and English letters read: Amity Mobile Medical Team. Inside the van, ten young people in the same white T-shirts are excitedly looking out of the windows at the scenes changing rapidly before their eyes.

These young people are post-graduate students from Nanjing Medical University, who used to be doctors in different hospitals before coming to university to study for their Master and Ph.D. degrees. The destination of their trip is a small township in northern Jiangsu - Huangji. Wishing to help the farmers in this poverty-stricken area of the province, the students have joined Amity's mobile medical team during their holidays to provide free consultation and treatment in the township hospital.

Driving into the hospital yard the next morning, they are astonished to see hundreds of patients waiting. Obviously the hospital has done a great publicity job!

The patients have already registered and are now waiting for their numbers to be called. Quickly, the young doctors go into the different work areas already assigned to them. As soon as they settle down to get ready for work, the patients follow closely, quickly filling each room. In the countryside, this is the way patients wait for their treatment - they only feel safe and secure if they can observe the doctors closely.

After taking some photos of the doctors, I walk outside, where a large number of patients is still waiting for their turn. A big piece of board on the wall with photos and brief introductions of the hospital doctors catches my sight. After reading it carefully, I begin to understand why Amity's medical team is so attractive to the patients. None of the twenty doctors and nursing staff in the hospital has got a bachelor degree, so the young doctors with Ph. D. and master degrees are considered "experts". Nobody wants to lose the chance to get treatment from experts from the provincial capital!
Two and half days quickly pass. Apart from treating more than 200 patients, the students also give several lectures on diagnosis and treatment of some common diseases. "We have missed this kind of lectures for far too long," one local doctor sighs.

"The medical and health conditions over here are still quite poor. There are a lot of things that we could do to help them, both the hospital and the patients," the young doctors agree.

There are indeed many things left to do before people in the countryside will have proper access to medical facilities. Amity has been engaged in mobile medical services for more than 10 years. Since its first trip to Xuyi in northern Jiangsu in 1989, the Amity mobile medical team has been to 10 provinces. About 30,000 patients have been treated, including hundreds of operations, and numerous training programmes have been conducted to improve local doctors’ skills. After its most recent trip to northern Jiangsu, Amity’s mobile medical team will have new members, and the white van will certainly continue to go to places in need of high-quality medical services.

He Congpei works in Amity’s Medical and Health Division and is also responsible for church-run projects within Amity.

---

**Fresh Off The Press!**

**THE AMITY 2003 CALENDAR.**

Not content to express their appreciation through a mere smile, many of Amity’s beneficiaries devote time and energy to the creation of thank you handicrafts. Amity has received hundreds of such lovingly crafted tokens of gratitude, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and ethnic diversity of the people we work with. Our 2003 calendar presents a selection of these stunning works of folk art. Order now!

For orders of less than ten calendars:

The Amity Foundation, Hong Kong Ltd.
18F, Ultraspace Commercial Building
5 Jordan Road
Kwun Tong, KONG KONG SAR
P.R. China

Cheques must be made payable to "The Amity Foundation, Hong Kong Ltd."

Price: US$ 5 per copy including airmail postage

For orders of more than ten copies, please contact our

Nanjing headquarters:

The Amity Foundation
71 Han Kou Road
Nanjing, JS 210008
P.R. China

Cheques must be made payable to "The Amity Foundation"

Price: US$ 3 per copy for orders of more than 20 copies.
Riding High: Mobile Surgical Clinic Reaches Qinghai-Tibet Plateau

In a festive ceremony, Amity's first mobile surgical clinic for Tibet was donated to Tibet's First People's Hospital on June 12, 2002. Kathy Call of China Connection, Insik Kim of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Amity's Associate General Secretary Li Enlin were present on the occasion.

Later on, Amity's operating-room-on-wheels had its real inauguration in Deqing, dozens of kilometres away from the autonomous region's capital Lhasa. When the medical team arrived, residents crowded the streets to welcome it, and hundreds of patients were already waiting outside the local hospital. Hospital staff had to use crowd control measures to ensure orderly access to medical consultation. So popular was the new clinic that the 200 registration forms prepared in advance had to be used over and over. 619 patients were examined and five operations performed on the clinic's first day alone.

The mobile surgical clinic donated to Tibet was the third clinic of this kind to be given by Amity to China's western provinces over the past two years. When Amity's first mobile surgical clinic was given to Qinghai in 1999, the People's Daily hailed the event as the "first mobile surgical clinic of the country". Jointly designed by Amity and the Shanghai Sanyi Machinery Company, all mobile surgical clinics come with ventilation, air conditioning, lighting and of course facilities for surgical purposes. The clinics consist of pre and post operation sections and are suitable for general and specialised operations such as ophthalmological and gynaecological surgery. Amity's mobile surgical services are not only convenient, but patients also save significantly due to lower operation and travel fees.

Farewell to Rita Mok and Welcome to Helena Chan

Amity's Hong Kong office recently bade farewell to Rita Mok, the office's accountant and editor of the overseas Chinese version of the Nanjing Theological Review. With her enthusiasm and competence, Rita truly embodied Amity's traditional "three C's" (compassion, commitment, competence). Rita and her husband have resettled in Britain, where Rita will nurture her personal rural development project: tending to her apple tree.

Rita's position has now been filled by Helena Chan. The Hong Kong office is very happy to have found a new colleague of Helena's commitment and experience, in particular in church-related work. Helena served in the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) for over ten years before joining Amity. Her former position was as secretary to the Secretary General of the Christian Conference of Asia.