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The Amity Foundation is an independent Chinese voluntary organisation. It was created in 1985 on the initiative of Chinese Christians. It has worked to promote education, social services, health, and rural development in the underdeveloped areas of China.

Amity’s work is grounded in the belief that all human beings share the same dignity. Abiding by the principle of mutual respect in faith, Amity builds friendship with both Christians and non-Christians in China and abroad. In this way, Amity contributes to China’s social development and openness to the outside world. It makes Christian involvement and participation in meeting the needs of society more widely known to the Chinese people and serves as a channel for people-to-people contact and the ecumenical sharing of resources. Helping to develop civil society in China is one of the key aims of its work.

The Amity Foundation has about 50 full-time staffers at its Nanjing headquarters. Hundreds of volunteers work with Amity all over China. The foundation receives funds from partners abroad as well as in Hong Kong and mainland China.

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When Building Homes is Not Enough

Farmers in Woyun have great material needs to pick up their lives again. But there is more to reconstruction than building houses.

by Beate Engelen

“How Amity assisted
In Woyun, Amity had pushed hard all year to give farmers their new homes as quickly as possible. Cheques were signed as soon as farmers were able to attest that they were in fact building their homes earthquake-proof.

These efforts seem to have paid off. The earthquake-proof structures in Woyun were erected much more quickly than in any of the neighboring villages, says one village official. Most of them are now finished. Many farmers from the neighborhood visited Woyun to study the architectural sketches of earthquake-proof houses, which had been given only to the people in Woyun by compassionate architects from Hong Kong. The people from the neighboring villages seem to have copied the Woyun sketches because they are so good.

In addition to subsidizing new homes, Amity had handed out warm winter clothes, blankets and large metal containers to keep harvested crops dry and out of reach from ravenous rodents. All of these goods and donations were greatly appreciated by the people in Woyun. But an NGO cannot be content with meeting only material needs, however welcome this is. There is much more to rebuilding a village than this.

For a community shaken to the core by a disaster it is no less important to regain civility, trust and a public spirit than to build new homes for everyone. Or in the words of Confucius mentioned above, it is the “rites”, the civic virtues, that need to be restored. How was this to be done?

Three main goals had to be reached in order
to bring the community back on its feet and “restore the rites” in Woyun Village: a) Convince the villagers that they can trust the NGO (Amity in this case); b) create an environment in which villagers trust each other; and c) develop a community spirit so people unite and have fun together.

Trust the NGO
It is, of course, a banality to declare that an NGO needs to be trustworthy in order to do a good job. But how can you prove your credibility to people who have had mixed experiences in the past? Not every farmer in Woyun was convinced from the start that the Amity Foundation, which was not very well known, actually told the truth about wanting to subsidize everyone in the community. Some people, fearing that funds for building their homes might dry up all too soon, tried to bend the rules. By secretly bypassing safety measures, they thought they could lay hands on their part of the money first. Amity had to develop strategies to put doubt- ful people at ease without cutting back on safety standards.

The trust offensive started with Amity opening its own office in the village, equipped with modern communication devices and manned by staff from Nanjing headquarters, who worked 24/7 and slept on pallets in one of the two small rooms. The fact that villagers could drop in any time to seek advice or make complaints made a big impression on the community.

A next step included a lot of leg-work. Amity staffers Yue Yaomeng, Gong Sheng and Shu Junsong soon became familiar faces. They walked tirelessly up and down the mud paths, signing cheques, giving advice and convincing people to observe safety standards.

Key to winning villagers’ trust was a high level of transparency. Outside the office, a list on a billboard included every single person who had received funds or was entitled to receive funds soon. Everybody could check the list and, in case of doubt or disagreement, complain right away.

Trust your Neighbors
For the long-term perspective of the village community, however, it was even more important that farmers trusted each other. Could they rely on their neighbors and fellow villagers even though everybody had ample needs? A series of participatory activities, which Amity conducted during the reconstruction period, put solidarity among villagers to the test.

The first occasion for such a test came up when the poorest family of each of the 16 village groups was to be selected. Each village group was asked to agree on the most needy family, who would then receive an extra CNY 1000 construction subsidy from Amity. At first, most of the farmers hurried to declare their own family to be the poorest. But finally, after a lot of discussing and soul-searching, a consensus within each village group was reached and the actual poorest family was selected. Village solidarity had won.

Strengthen the Community Spirit
Ultimately, a village needs to establish a community spirit to solve its problems in the future. In Sichuan, this had been lost; not just because the destructive earthquake brought each family to largely mind their own private problems. Social cohesion of rural communities has been on the decline for many decades.

It first came under pressure when the commune system was dissolved in the early eighties, even as farmers’ material conditions improved greatly when private agricultural production was officially sanctioned. Farmers became lone fighters in their struggle to survive right up to the earthquake in 2008. But reconstruction poses an opportunity to reverse the trend towards less and less community spirit.

In order to strengthen social cohesion in a community, it greatly helps to create commonly shared memories. In Woyun, the farmers decided to give it a try. With support from Amity staff Shu Junsong, a festival, the first of its kind, was organized by villagers to celebrate Spring Festival as a community. Various kinds of performances were organized, but the singing contest clearly beat them all. For weeks before the event, Shu Junsong recalls, small singing ensembles rehearsed their tunes in private homes to prepare for the big day.

The event succeeded in promoting public spirit. Of all the help Amity has given, says Liu Yingquan, an old farmer from Woyun Village, initiating social activities was the best part: “It made us all more self-confident to face the future.”
Opinion

Interview with Qiu Zhonghui

Amity has done a lot of relief and reconstruction work. Are you content with the result?

It is important whether or not the local beneficiaries, rather than me, are content with the result. Only half an hour after the event we sent staff to the crisis region. The same day, we decided to commit CNY 2 million. That was the first time Amity has pledged such a big amount at the very beginning of the emergency work. Also on that day, we sent an appeal to our partners. Our greatest concern was to meet the needs of the victims as soon as possible. Reconstruction was also quite successful. Woyun was the village where reconstruction work made the quickest progress and ran more smoothly than in other villages. By the end of June 2009, all the house reconstruction work was completed. Only a few of the houses have not been re-decorated yet.

Amity opened an office in Woyun Village to manage and supervise reconstruction work. Is Amity doing a job the villagers should be doing themselves?

It was very meaningful for Amity to establish the Sichuan Earthquake Reconstruction Office in Woyun, which is staffed with Amity employees around the clock. The traditional institutional system and the conventional way of doing emergency relief is not appropriate after a disaster of such scale and with such huge loss of lives and assets. Setting up this office makes our work more efficient and effective. Also, being stationed in the village can strengthen and deepen staffers’ understanding of the locality, the project targets and local partners. In addition to promoting participation of local people in the reconstruction effort, the office can accomplish better coordination of the project and increase the involvement of the experts. Through process management and control, it is easier to realize project capacity building and to investigate the special needs of the local people. For example, a survey conducted by our Office in August 2008 showed that the material most needed for agricultural recovery after the quake were granaries. So we provided each family with one.

However, we don’t want to replace the local people. We organized a Village Reconstruction Committee, elected by the villagers. We have worked with the people. It is important that they make their own decisions and develop the village according to their needs. Our reconstruction work will end at some point, so we have to emphasize self-development. Support from outside is, of course, very important, too. I want to thank all the people who have helped our work, especially the experts from the Hong Kong Institute of Architects, the Hong Kong Institute of Planners and others. They visited the village to give instructions and training. Farmers quickly understood the key points of seismic fortification. The training has enabled local people to participate in reconstruction work.

The new houses in Woyun survived the recent 5.6 M aftershock undamaged. We have learned a lot about the importance of technical support and other details. Mr. Liao, head of Village Group 2 and member of the Village Reconstruction Committee, has improved his working capacity and reputation by attending a training by the Hong Kong experts. Many families invited him to inspect their houses. Amity staffers have actually learned a lot themselves about reconstruction.

What does Amity want to achieve besides reconstructing homes?

We are working to help victims with reconstruction in three aspects: their houses, their community, their spirit and morality. There are many tasks ahead for Amity. We want to reconstruct the drinking water and broadcasting system and promote organic agriculture. To help rebuild the local community, we are considering to expand the role of the Village Reconstruction Committee. In the future it could take care of community management in agricultural technique, road management, health management etc.

We want to help them set up an autonomous village organization to realize sustainable development. We hope that eventually all our activities will help to develop a community spirit in Woyun. This is very important because many families have lost homes and relatives. They tend to concentrate on solving their personal problems on their own. But we should work together as a community to overcome these problems. By organizing cultural events and village art performances as well as emphasizing elections, we hope that farmers become more self-reliant and enhance their self-development ability.

After one year of work, local villagers and Amity are confident that the village will have a bright future.

www.amityfoundation.org
The Old Church Building
The Mianzhu Church was built in 1923 by Anglican missionaries. Extensive renovation works had just finished when the earthquake struck in May 2008. The structure was solidly built, which prevented it from collapsing altogether during the earthquake. The damage to the old building, however, was so extensive it could not be used for the regular services any longer. The Mianzhu Church was among the devastated buildings classified as “D-” on a scale of A to D. Simply put, although it cannot be used, for historical reasons it will not be demolished but will be retained as a memorial for the earthquake. The front of the church collapsed and the church walls developed cracks. Tiles fell from the roof. Two members of the congregation died during the earthquake and the homes of many church members were destroyed.

Spiritual Recovery
Many members of the congregation need spiritual support, says Pastor Gu, because they experienced dreadful feelings of helplessness during and after the earthquake. Believers now seek answers to questions like “Why did God not help us?” To provide for these spiritual needs the church offers “new life” training programs for all Christians who want to participate.

Providing a New Church Building
Amity helped the church with the construction of a temporary assembly room, which was dedicated in January 2009. Pastor Gu remembers that government officials from Mianzhu where surprised to learn that the local church received so much attention from a faith-initiated foundation as big as Amity. The church, they found, must be more important as a social factor than they thought. In the event, the officials have taken a more positive attitude towards the church, its members and their contribution to society. The congregation is raising money to build The building site has already been secured.

Pastor Gu Yumei
When the earthquake happened in May 2008, pastor Gu was studying for her master’s degree in another province. She headed back to Sichuan immediately. Her husband, who had stayed behind in Sichuan, started to purchase relief material and was one of the first to arrive in Mianzhu. Pastor Gu has since managed the recovery of the congregation.
Providing a New Church Building
Amity helped the church with the construction of a temporary assembly room, which was dedicated in January 2009. Pastor Gu remembers that government officials from Mianzhu were surprised to learn that the local church received so much attention from a faith-initiated foundation as big as Amity. The church, they found, must be more important as a social factor than they thought. In the event, the officials have taken a more positive attitude towards the church, its members and their contribution to society.

The congregation is raising money to build a new church. The building site has already been secured. Now the building itself needs to be financed.

Managing Rapid Church Growth
Many people didn’t know the church before the earthquake, says Pastor Gu. When members of the congregation took part in the relief efforts wherever they were able to help, distributing candles, lighters or mosquito repellants, the church became better known among people in Mianzhu. Social work and God’s love made people realize that there is a church, says Pastor Gu. The congregation has grown at least fivefold since that time. Now, the church conducts special leadership training courses for staff at the 13 new preaching points of the congregation.

Offering Social Services
During relief efforts the church collected money to help rural communities in the neighborhood. But the church wanted to do even more. Pastor Gu brims with enthusiasm when she talks about developing social services at the church. To name but a few: Plans are on the way to offer counseling to people with emotional difficulties. Offering an educational program to church members will help to raise the educational level of the whole congregation. (Most members have only finished junior middle school, some are still illiterate.) The church plans to run an English Corner (a social gathering for people to practice oral English) during summer vacation and a literacy class for women to help them with reading and writing. Pastor Gu believes that the church should reach out: “We help people, no matter if they are Christians or not.”

Helping Families
First of all, “we prayed for them” and helped them with everyday problems, says Pastor Gu. But in addition to that, people needed practical support. After the loss of their homes, many families found themselves in a position where they have had to handle complex financial matters. Above all, they have needed to raise and manage capital to build their new homes. The church has been able to advise these families on how to borrow money by acting as a bridge between them and potential donors and lenders from outside.
My name is Tang Zhengshu. I'm 15 years old and live in Woyun Village with my family. The earthquake of May 2008 was a disaster for us. Our house collapsed, the furniture was damaged and our livestock was buried under a pile of rubble. After this, my family sank into utter despair. Whenever memories of the terrible moment surfaced, I got a chilly feeling. Even late at night I had trouble going to sleep.

Very soon after the earthquake, people from the Amity Foundation came to our village. In the time immediately after the quake, as we struggled for survival, they gave us quilts and tarpaulins; at harvest time, they provided steel granaries and organic fertilizer; when cold winds were blowing, they brought warm winter clothes and shoes so we at once felt as if spring had already come. With Amity’s help, new houses have been built all around. Amity is like the first sunbeam in the morning, giving us hope and warmth; it is like a flower, letting us smell the freshness of spring; it is like a neon lamp at night, allowing us to see the path before our feet.

Writing competition
On the eve of Spring Festival 2009, I was very happy to hear that Amity planned to hold a big Spring Festival couplet writing competition! But – how would I be able to write a good couplet? I racked my brains … Then, one day, a friend of mine quoted a line from a popular folk song: “Pawn shops here, pawn shops there, pawn shops take things everywhere ...” Immediately I found myself in a sudden burst of creativity. Hadn’t there been a huge earthquake? Hadn’t a big outpouring of compassion followed in its wake? The relation of disaster and compassion, didn’t that exactly mirror our situation right now? I grabbed paper and pen right away to write down my idea before it could slip away. I spent some time altering and embellishing what I had written; then, finally, I had created my own work of art. The first part of my couplet read: “Big earthquake, small earthquake – big or small, the earthquake shatters people’s hearts”, the second part: “Your love, my love – your and my love connects people on the Earth”, and finally the horizontal part, which links the two: “New life for China”.

Becoming a volunteer
What I wanted to express was praise for Amity’s spirit of selfless dedication to helping us. I didn’t just write this couplet, but signed up as a volunteer for Amity as well: to decorate and clean the village meeting place, to cut paper for Spring Festival couplets, to reveal other people’s couplets on the stage, to add up scores, to hand over prizes. After the end of the contest, it was my job to tidy up the meeting place and help putting things in order again at the local Amity office. Being such a volunteer made me very happy! Although there were all sorts of different things to do, it was a good experience and I also learned some interesting things, e.g. how to organise a big event and what to pay attention to when so many people are involved.

I still remember very well the first round of the competition. I was standing behind the stage, feeling extremely nervous. And when I went on stage, I didn’t know where to look with all these hundreds of pairs of eyes directed at me. This got even worse when Mr. Gong of the Amity Foundation addressed me on the stage and asked me to introduce myself to the crowd and talk about the night’s programme. My heart was beating wildly, but somehow I still managed to say what was on my mind. I was surprised that the people reacted with friendly applause. After the event Mr. Gong told me that he hadn’t first introduced me because this would have reduced the effect on the audience. But then, it had been so surprisingly
easy. I think maybe this is what life is like: When we encounter difficulty, at first we're all overcome with fear, and if we don't dare to move at all, we may well end up remaining cowards. After my experience of being on that stage, I now feel that I'm able to step in front of a crowd all on my own and perform and it'll be just fine. I really profited from this experience.

What I didn't expect at all was that my Spring Festival couplet won the 2nd prize! What a stroke of luck! The big Spring Festival couplet competition not only brought happiness to our village, it also revealed our hidden artistic talents, including my own. All of us living in Woyun Village had seemed quite ordinary and unremarkable – now, all of a sudden, it became clear that we're really masterful makers of handicrafts!

At the first Spring Festival after the earthquake, it was the first time for me to make a couplet, the first time for me to serve as an Amity volunteer, the first time for me to experience the respect and appreciation of strangers, the first time for me to feel boundless happiness. The smiles on all faces were so bright, all hearts were brimming with unspeakable gratitude. There is so much love in the world – this is why we got in contact with the Amity Foundation and why we have been able to build up our confidence. Love is so deep, so beautiful: Thank you, sisters and brothers of Amity, peace and happiness be with you!

Tales from the Road

Amity Staffers Remember

Gong Sheng

For the children of Woyun, Gong Sheng is the perfect older brother - someone to love and to look up to.

“Promoting popular traditions and folk culture is one part of development work which Amity wants to emphasize. Mid-Autumn Festival and Spring Festival are certainly two great opportunities to promote this idea. On September 15, we pulled off what became the the first “Mid-Autumn-Festival Gathering” in the history of Woyun Village. Later, around Spring Festival 2009, we staged a series of cultural activities, hoping that they would bring some happiness to the lives of the villagers so they could pick up their lives again and regain confidence.

The greatest thing about the cultural program was that so many villagers attended. Participating in these activities meant more than just taking part in the program. It showed that villagers were actively taking part in organizing and managing these events and that the farmers were making an effort to promote their traditional culture.”

Shu Junsong

Villagers have become very fond of Shu Junsong. He is reliable and highly efficient.

“Before the Spring Festival cultural programs started, we Amity staffers were very active in getting people interested in participating. Gradually, however, it was not just us who pushed the idea. Everybody around us kept supporting the program.

On the evening of one of the first days after Spring Festival, I arrived at the Amity Office in Woyun Village. I hadn't even quite got out the bus yet when I already heard the sound of singing floating towards me from a distance. Several village groups were holding their rehearsals for the upcoming competition. Several days later, you could hear the faint sound of choir singing in every street and every small alley of Woyun Village. Nobody had given people this task and nobody had prepared for them to do it. The villagers were inspiring us to work harder than before.”
Amity’s Disaster Relief and Reconstruction Principles

Selecting Beneficiaries
Amity is committed to helping people in the countryside who are habitually overlooked during relief operations and reconstruction efforts. Special attention is given to the poorest members of a community, who receive extra financial support, home appliances or daily necessities (for example a bed or a rice cooker). Priority is given to the support of women by encouraging their participation in decision-making bodies as well as by introducing technology (running water, biogas systems) which facilitates work usually done by women (gathering firewood, fetching water, cooking).

Participatory Approach
In order to promote democratic principles, Amity emphasizes a participatory approach in development and disaster management. Early involvement of communities can ensure that time and resources are saved and mistakes and conflicts are avoided. By involving people at the grassroots directly, Amity can more easily assess people’s actual needs, find local solutions and, at the same time, encourage villagers to act as stakeholders in the relief and reconstruction process. Farmers in Woyun Village, for example, were encouraged to participate in the planning, implementation and monitoring process at every stage of the reconstruction efforts. Village authorities commonly welcome Amity’s democratic decision-making process because it provides them with a strong supportive base in the community and confers legitimacy to their governing role.

Monitoring
During reconstruction in Sichuan, Amity has kept an office in Woyun Village for staff from Nanjing to assist villagers with planning, implementation and monitoring of the project. Villagers selected their own monitoring groups which were responsible for supervising the construction of earthquake-proof houses and the distribution of subsidies. Special training enabled them to follow recognized standards.

Partnership Selection
Amity cooperates with a broad range of partners in order to achieve recognition of our work and to involve relevant groups which can promote our objectives. By building good relationships with governmental units, Amity remains flexible in implementing projects and can, at the same time, advocate successful ideas and work for policy changes. By involving academic partners to participate, Amity draws attention to social needs and simultaneously brings academic expertise to underserved communities. Shortly after the earthquake, Amity invited experts to offer psychological training and counseling to victims in Sichuan, giving them an opportunity to learn more about treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. Specialists from Hong Kong and overseas provide us with international expertise and keep us informed about international developments. During reconstruction in Woyun Village, for instance, Amity invited architects from Hong Kong to design earthquake-proof homes and to train farmers how to observe high standards in the house construction process.

Total Direct Project Expenses for Relief and Reconstruction until June 2009

Between May 2008 and June 2009, Amity has allocated a total of CNY 24,455,768 to the Sichuan Earthquake projects.

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<td>House Reconstruction</td>
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<td>Drinking Water System</td>
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<td>Social-Psychological Support</td>
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(All figures in the table above are in renminbi.)
Consequences of the Disaster

Luo Li Has Changed ...

by Beate Engelen

The new homes in Woyun Village are almost all finished, traffic is buzzing and people are busy planning their future. It almost seems as if pre-disaster conditions have been restored — things seem even better than before, with all the specially designed houses which will protect the farmers from future earthquakes. But a disaster of this scale is bound to have an impact on the way people think. There must have been changes in people's outlook on life.

Luo Li (right), a girl of fifteen from Woyun Village, agreed to talk to me during lunch-break at her school about the changes in her life. She had been among the students who ran for life when her school was about to collapse. All the students made it to safety in time, some carried on the backs of their teachers. These scenes had given Luo Li nightmares and caused occasional sleeplessness right after the event, but bad dreams have by now ceased almost completely to bother her. Life has returned to normal.

It is her and her family that have changed since the disaster, says Lao Li. She remembers that money used to be a common topic in her family, a frequent cause of disagreement between her parents. “But since the earthquake, my parents’ point of view has changed,” says Lao Li. In her view, her parents have become less materialistic, valuing life as such more than before. Change has also taken hold of herself: “I have matured,” she says, “I am less naughty than before.”

Today, she buys her own clothes in Mianzhu and she takes care of the family household, doing the laundry and cooking meals for her father and grandparents. She admits that love in the family is now the most important thing in life.

Inner values

The earthquake, it seems, has become a turning point in common people’s lives. But have people really come to appreciate “inner values” more deeply? Are idealistic motives shaping their behavior more than before the disaster?

Walking around Woyun Village, I certainly got this impression. To begin with, there was a greater tolerance towards expressing a religious belief. Small signs of faith have sprung up everywhere in Woyun Village. Books on Buddhism can now be found on the bookshelves of village officials. A calendar featuring a famous Buddhist monk adorns the office wall of the village heads and the village doctor’s treatment room. Common people openly display objects of so-called folk religions, obtained at a nearby Buddhist temple and hung above the doors in order to scare away evil spirits. These signs of religious convictions are more clearly visible than before.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, villagers have also eagerly embraced a new communal spirit, which had been dormant for many decades. Communal celebrations of major festivals, discussion groups on village affairs and democratic forms of decision-making in the community have greatly strengthened people’s confidence in recent months - so they say. But does all this mean that Luo Li’s family and all the other farmers in Woyun have found a new placidity? Hardly so.

Money is still an issue

Conditions keep people worried about their future. Like almost everybody else, Luo Li’s family had to build a new house with little money at hand. Although her father was able to do manual work, only her mother secured a paid job. She has worked as a domestic helper in the capital Chengdu, earning around CNY 750 per month. Most villagers who become migrants have less than that on their payroll. Jobs have been lost and wages have plummeted since the global economic crisis began last fall. Post-quake rehabilitation work was still going on at that time. Farmers cannot make up for such losses by selling their agricultural produce. Broken roads, destroyed in the earthquake, have hampered logistics and therefore pushed up prices for vegetables formerly exported to other regions. The farmers have therefore reverted to subsistence farming or to selling potatoes at local markets. Villagers in Woyun say they urgently need better agricultural technology and knowledge about avoiding being eventually pushed to the fringes of society.

Even if their outlook on life has changed, people in Woyun are still too poor to stop worrying about money and their material future. Despite her young age, Luo Li is no exception. When she was a child, she admits, her dream was to be a policewoman, but lately she has been content with just finding some job soon and raising a family of her own. When she earns money, Luo Li thinks, her relatives will stop worrying and this will eventually improve the relationships in her family.
Volunteers

Manual Work

Kwong Chin-Kin, an engineer from Hong Kong, mucked in to help villagers in Woyun build earthquake-proof homes correctly.

Villagers in Woyun received technical training by a Hong Kong expert on how to rebuild houses so they are able to withstand an earthquake. Kwong Chun-Kin, a construction expert and consultant to Amity’s Hong Kong Office, stayed in Woyun Village for two weeks to observe the post-disaster reconstruction process there and provide hands-on training in building methods to villagers (picture above). 65-year old Mr. Kwong, who looks back on 40 years of experience in construction, had produced a hand-drawn manual which can be easily understood even by illiterates. The manual outlines seismic safety standards and explains basic construction methods, such as mixing concrete and selecting suitable steel rods for reinforcement.

Working often until three o’clock in the morning, Mr. Kwong walked up and down the little paths between the paddy fields of Woyun to visit people’s homes and give them advice. When the villagers realized how serious Mr. Kwong was about helping them, they started inviting him to stop by their own construction sites.

People in 16 natural villages need to reconstruct their homes according to the new seismic safety standards issued by the central government. Amity has been involved here in training construction experts who can monitor the construction of quake-proof homes, as well as in other efforts to support the local population after the earthquake. It is one of Amity’s main objectives in Woyun to empower villagers to effectively supervise the reconstruction efforts.

News

Drinking Water

“Wells of Happiness”

Amity’s local office in Woyun Village (Mianzhu), Sichuan Province, recently finished a drinking water project. 12 wells have been restored to good working order, corroded pipes have been replaced in 7 places, 3 new pumps have been installed. The earthquake of May 2008 not only led to the collapse of well shafts and damaged pipes, it also changed groundwater levels all over the region. In Woyun, 14 out of a total of 16 wells didn’t yield any water anymore. Some 3000 people were severely affected, both because they had no easy access to safe drinking water and because they lacked water for the irrigation of crops. Some families had to fetch water from a township distribution point more than 2 kilometers away. This was especially difficult for elderly people whose working-age children had left to work in the cities. Many of these had also put up their little children with their grandparents in the village. Some of the elderly and children of Woyun had no choice but to fetch their water from a nearby ditch instead. Drinking this unclean water posed a great risk to people’s health. In close cooperation with the villagers and with the Woyun Reconstruction Committee, Amity’s local staff initiated the necessary research and soon started work on the rapid restoration of the drinking water system. After the completion of work, villagers are now joking that “Amity has given us wells of happiness.”

Special Education

Conference held on Bilingual Deaf Education

In May this year, some 180 specialists, leaders and teachers from European and Asian countries met in Suzhou for a three-day conference on bilingual deaf education - one of the most advanced concepts in special education world-wide. The Amity Foundation, in cooperation with the Norwegian Signo Foundation, has pioneered its adoption in China, first under a pilot project starting in 1996 and later on a broader basis. Today, bilingual deaf education is used at four special education facilities in Jiangsu Province: the Suzhou School for the Blind and Deaf, the Changzhou School for the Deaf, the Yangzhou Special Education School and the Zhenjiang Special Education Centre. Since 2006 this concept has spread further west, to the provinces of Guizhou and Sichuan. In these last five years, the project has accumulated an impressive body of experience and reached the hoped-for results.