New Home Built for Saiqi Children

By Jessica Yang ’08 and Cheng-Cheng Zheng ’08
Saiqi Liaisons

This month, the construction of the new building for the Saiqi orphanage was completed. With the support and commitment of Harvard China Care, a new home has finally been built for 34 orphans who had previously been living in a decrepit, broken down building.

The Saiqi orphanage is home to children ranging in age from a few months to 25 years old. A single Catholic woman, Ms. Xu, runs the orphanage. In her 20 years at Saiqi, she has cared for over 600 abandoned children and found foster families for the majority of them.

The completion of the new five-story home in NingDe, a city located an hour away from SaiQi, this month brings to fruition Ms. Xu’s dream of giving the children a permanent home that will provide them with a safe and healthy environment in which to grow.

However, a significant amount of work is still needed to appropriately furnish the building. Nearly $100,000 is still needed in order to transform the building into a comfortable home. This opportunity is very exciting, because once finished, the Saiqi Orphanage may gain more credibility in the area and be renamed the “NingDe Orphanage.”

For Saiqi, this New Year brings both inspirational and sad news. Over the winter, two of the younger children, Xu Mei Hai (girl, 1 yr) and Xu ZhenZhen (girl, 1 yr), passed away due to chronic fevers and colds. Xu Mei Hai had already been hospitalized for recurring lung infections arising from her congenital heart defect; both children were simply too weak to withstand their illnesses despite frequent hospital care.

Despite these losses, Ms. Xu works on and the orphanage continues to take in more needy children. Ms. Xu recently took in two abandoned girls: one is currently in Beijing receiving treatment for bowlegs and the other (17 yr.) is in Hong Kong receiving heart surgery. The remainder of the children are doing well, all having received new clothing in celebration of the Chinese New Year.

Harvard China Care is also excited about its upcoming second partnership with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Once again, four Harvard students and four PolyU students will be traveling to SaiQi together and working there.
Our Dumplings Program has been filled with laughter, friendships, and Wushu this season! During our past play groups, Dumplings children and volunteers have celebrated the Autumn Moon Festival together, listened to Chinese music, created their own Chinese art, learned about the Chinese Zodiac, and practiced Chinese martial arts.

C-Sharp, Harvard’s Asian a Capella Group, perform popular Chinese songs for the Dumplings’ girls.

Dumplings brings together children adopted from China and their families to learn about and share Chinese culture in a fun, interactive way. Children of all ages are welcome, though most Dumpling girls are between ages 4 and 9. As always, parents are encouraged to stay to meet other adoptive parents and share their experiences.

In addition to the regular Harvard volunteers, Dumplings was pleased to welcome volunteers from the University of Connecticut this season, who are planning to start a Dumplings program in their own town. The increased participation from student volunteers enabled the girls to engage in a lot of one-on-one interaction with a great group of energetic and enthusiastic role models.

We would like to thank the Harvard Wushu Club, C-Sharp, and the Harvard Chinese Yo-Yo Club for performing for our playgroup. Because of these wonderful student groups, the girls enjoyed learning Chinese martial arts, singing Chinese pop songs, and attempting to master a Chinese Yo-Yo.

If you would like to attend our next Dumplings program with your child please RSVP in advance so we know how many to expect!

Mentoring Program Continues To Grow

By Katherine Chau ’09
Mentoring Co-Coordinator

The Harvard China Care Mei-Mei/Jie-Jie Mentoring Program (“Little sister / Big sister”) has expanded this year to over 25 mei-mei/jie-jie pairs. Meeting at least once a month and keeping in constant contact, mei-meis and their jie-jies have developed close bonds with one another, becoming as close as real sisters.

This past semester, mei-meis and jie-jies gathered for a number of monthly mentoring events, where mentors and mentees meet have the opportunity to interact with all the other participants in the program.

At the monthly events this past semester, mentors and mentees donned imaginary chef aprons as they got their hands messy when rolling up the traditional Chinese breakfast food item: fan tuan (rice rolls). Mentors and mentees played each other in board games that ranged from Scrabble and Clue to Taboo. Mentor-mentee pairs took on other pairs in charades, acting out characters that ranged from simple kitchen utensils to Disney movies.

In December, mentors and mentees came together for the monthly event, where they had the opportunity to exercise their creativity and make glittery Chinese lanterns, which could be hung on holiday trees.

The new semester promises the strengthening of the bonds that have already been formed between mei-meis and their jie-jies. The next monthly event is on February 25th and celebrates the Chinese New Year with an outing into Chinatown for dim sum. Red envelopes will be passed out and stories of how the Chinese zodiac came to be will be told. All the while, delicious food will be consumed as mentors and mentees celebrate the new year of the pig with each other.

The Mei-Mei/Jie-Jie program (“Little sister / Big sister”) is a means through which we want to foster continued interest in Chinese culture for adopted children nine years old and up.
We are extremely excited to present our runners for the 111th Boston Marathon, which will take place on April 16 this year. Both Jessica Chao ’07 and Jessica Yang ’08 will be running, and raising money for Harvard China Care through the marathon which is sponsored by the Boston Athletic Association.

Yang, a member of HCC since her sophomore year and now HCC’s vice president, is a biochemical studies major and lives in Kirkland House. Jessica Chao is a neurobiology concentrator and lives in Adams House. She has been running track for over eight years and is running in this year’s marathon because, she said, “the marathon will be an exciting and important challenge for me. This race will be greater than any other I’ve run both in distance and in purpose. I’m looking forward to pushing myself through each of those 26.2 miles for Harvard China Care and the kids I will raise money for.”

Yang explained that although she is “by no means a seasoned runner,” visiting the Saiqi orphanage last summer inspired her to take on the marathon challenge. “I now know the tangible differences we are making in their lives and the reason for all our hard work,” she said. Each of our marathon runners is hoping to raise up to $5,000 to help support HCC. If you are interested in supporting our runners as they warm up and work out for the marathon, please contact us!

HCC Sells Holiday Candy Canes

In an effort to raise as much money as possible for Harvard China Care, the fundraising committee spearheaded a candy cane sale for the holiday season that raised a total of $125.50! The candy canes were sold all over campus and even hand-delivered to special recipients by request of our buyers. Thank you to everyone who bought candy canes and made this fundraiser a huge success!
There are 31 blind orphans at Bethel Foster Home in Hebei Province, China. My time there last summer was a continuous lesson in humility and gratitude, not for my own ability to see, but for the very gift of knowing every precious child at Bethel.

There was one four year-old girl in particular who captivated me. Her name is Chun Yu, which means Spring Jade. Looking into her beautiful, long-lashed eyes, one cannot easily tell she is blind. Her smile and laugh are like that of a delicate maiden out of Chinese literary classics.

It saddened me to see her crying in discomfort during any type of physical activity. Her speech abilities seemed quite limited; she often interchanged “I” and “you” when constructing sentences. Yet she had memorized over a hundred Chinese children’s poems and could recite them perfectly whenever prompted with a title.

Other volunteers who had come to Bethel in previous years noticed the differences in Chun Yu’s behavior. She no longer approached people and sang to them or did much of anything on her own. She frequently vomited and felt dizzy from simple movements.

She went for a checkup on August 4, and the doctor insisted on giving her an MRI free of charge. We discovered the problem—a brain tumor one-fourth the size of her brain, situated over her pituitary gland. It was benign, but had been growing for two years, taking away her vision along with much of her cognitive ability, but sparing her exceptional memory.

Chun Yu was placed in a hospital we were familiar with; the Bethel staff wanted doctors they could trust to take care of her. But something nagged at me and my mother, who had visited Bethel only a few days earlier and had fallen in love with Chun Yu. The hospital had no pediatric ward and did not specialize in neurosurgery. The removal surgery would be highly risky.

Through the connections of another volunteer, we got an appointment for her at Tiantan, the best hospital in Beijing for neurosurgery, which then referred her to the Beijing Navy General Hospital. Instead of performing invasive surgery, doctors drew the fluid out of the tumor with a needle and inserted a radiation pill to kill off the tumor cells.

I visited Chun Yu as much as I could, just wanting to sit by her side and watch her sleep, wanting to be there whenever she woke up. I bought her a doll and told her it had just had surgery too, so they could be friends. I stayed overnight in Beijing when she had seizures as an aftereffect of the procedure, worried for her health but reassured by the doctors that it was normal.

All the while, she never complained or threw a fit; it was not in her nature, perhaps not within her ability to do so.

After two weeks, she returned to Bethel and continued recuperating. The night before I left for America, I gave her a key chain that said, “The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you.” She was the last of the beloved children at Bethel I saw from the car window, standing on the side of the driveway waving goodbye to me with her nanny. I hoped she would remember me. I didn’t know when I would see her again.

But, she did remember me. Last month, I heard her sweet laugh on the phone as she said my name, “older sister Ann.” She had received the Christmas presents my family mailed to her, and was very happy even as she lay on a hospital bed awaiting further treatment for the tumor, which had grown back.

A week ago, Chun Yu was transferred to a hospital in Wuhan where the tumor was almost completely removed by an expert neurosurgeon.

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A Volunteer Stays In Touch With Girl

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For the past six months, she has become more and more a part of my family, as my mother has worked tirelessly to find the best doctors for her in America and in China. Her story has spread to many people across America and China through phone calls and emails asking for support and prayer. We believe she will have a bright future despite the difficulties she faces as a blind and disabled child. Through our labor of love in saving her life, she has become ever more precious to us, and has shown us ever more the value of life, the joy of a simple smile, and the miracle that is every child.

The costs of surgery and care are estimated to be around $11,000 to $14,000 spread out over the next few months. If you would like to make a donation toward Chun Yu’s care, you can write a check to this organization which regularly wires donations to Bethel and issues receipts to donors:

Legacy Charities
PO Box 311671
New Braunfels, TX 78131-1671
Ref: Bethel China/Chun Yu’s surgery

New Medical Book Will Aid Volunteers

By Tara Tai ’10
Medical Committee Co-Coordinator

Harvard China Care’s medical committee is putting together a comprehensive medical conditions book this semester, which will detail the symptoms and treatments of many illnesses and disabilities such as cerebral palsy and cleft lip/palate.

Included in this book will also be “medical cards” with descriptions of various positions and techniques that physical therapists may use with children. The last section of the book will summarize different methods of interacting with the orphans.

While primarily designed to inform this year’s interns about the best ways to identify diseases and/or disabilities and deal with potential challenges, the book will be available to the general public as well. It will be written in English, with Mandarin character and pinyin translations for each of the conditions described. Hopefully, the Medical Conditions Book will prepare interns for some of the situations they will encounter at the orphanages in China; it will be finished and distributed in the beginning of March.

The Medical Committee is also continuing to allocate donations of medical supplies, clothing, and mentally stimulating toys from local businesses and Dumpings and Mentoring parent to various orphanages in China.

This semester, the Medical Committee is also planning a lecture by Joan Kaufman, the director of the AIDS Public Policy project and a professor at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. She has worked extensively with population and reproductive health issues in China.

In April, she will be speaking to students planning on interning in Chinese orphanages this summer. The talk will be open to all Harvard students and the wider Cambridge and Boston community.

Please stay tuned for more detailed information concerning the exact date, time and location of the talk. We look forward to seeing you there!