

August 14, 2008

Hi, everybody,

I have returned safely to Chengdu after my trip to Nanba and the Pingwu Xian. I visited another two of the most devastated sites on the trip, and it was a very intense experience. There are still people removing debris and digging out bodies with hand tools, and the need for immediate aid is still acute. One high school in Pingtong, for instance, will not have even the space and basic equipment and supplies when students are due to return next week. In the rural areas, students are mostly living in for they cannot travel long distance everyday; and that means the school has to house and feed a significant proportion of the nearby communities. The school is central to the community (our idea of developing a local school into a community hub makes so much sense), but they food and living space for their students are not forthcoming. The principal of the school was totally stressed out. There are just insufficient temporary housing units (called *banfang* locally) to go by. They do not have cooking utensils and secured supply of clean water. There is no washroom except a temporary dug-out shed for the entire town.

I can go on and on with a long list of needs and the challenges they face; and it is easy to feel powerless and helpless in such circumstances. What impressed me the most, however, was the resilience of the people. We (together with Professor Jia of Beijing Institute of Technology and Xu Bo of Tsinghua) have heard many amazing stories of courage and selfless service. I really hope that people in Toronto can help out more.

The training program for the psychiatrists, doctors, and mental health professionals has started. The training team (consisting of expert trainers from Chengdu, Beijing, Kunming, Hong Kong, and Toronto) assembled and had a very good TTT (train the trainers) session the whole day yesterday, and we will continue today. The TTT session is working out extremely well, and the training team feels very optimistic that we will do a good job.

The actual training will start on the 15th. Stanley Kwan and his colleagues from Fu Hui (who generously provided start up funding for our training program) are going to be here. The participants list shows that we have attracted the most experienced and reputable colleagues to come to the training (over 110 of them), and our team is very encouraged by the recruitment. We do run into some issues with space (the hospital has limited space available for training because of the huge service demands) and increased cost (quite a few things are costing more than we thought) but I think we are OK for now (Kar Wah Chan helped out in raising extra funds). I wish to thank all those of you who have helped us with our fundraising, and I hope you will all continue to support our work.

Our immediate next step is to set up longer term ongoing supervision and case-consultation support for the participants, so that they can respond to the needs of the patients and clients they serve. Whereas it is not possible to meet all their training needs within a 3-day program, my sense is that we can return to do more if we can develop more financial support and

resources for this. I am confident that a few booster programs can increase the training capacity of our Chinese colleagues; and they can then take on major roles in training their own colleagues in Sichuan.

I have also been working on our long term community building and redevelopment initiative, and there are many meetings and visits with prospective partners and supporters that I have packed into my schedule. Figuring out who is doing what is a major challenge in itself. The irony is that there are countless people doing things and tons of money raised, but many communities are not getting the attention and the aid that they desperately need. A few showcase aid centres have been established and major brand names in international work have no presence in many of the most devastated areas. I have become more convinced that starting with one of the neglected communities is our way to go. I wish to thank Steve Shi, Rose Jin and Yong Wang for getting me into Nanba and Pingwu. Stanley Zheng and his WEPAT team (Shen Jianhua, Teng Yanqing, and Charles Jia) have offered invaluable information, advice, and support regarding the trip to Nanba and Pingwu as well as the training program.

I am optimistic that collaboration between community organizations in Toronto and the University will produce a solid initiative that can really make a difference. Your participation and input have already generated much appreciation and positive energy among our Chinese colleagues. I feel privileged to have the opportunity with work with all of you, and I am looking forward to the next steps of our collaboration.

Finally, I wish to thank all of you for what you have done for the project, and for the people of Sichuan.

Cheers,
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