

August 18, 2008

Hi, Everyone,

Greetings from Chengdu!

I wish to report to all of you that our training program was completed yesterday. My assessment is that the program is extremely successful, although we are still tallying the evaluation forms.

On August 13 and 14, the training team had an intensive TTT (Train the Trainers) workshop. Through brainstorming, active discussion, and collaborative deliberation, we went through the learning needs and expectations of the participants, the overall program structure, the overarching conceptual framework, the content to be covered, and specific formats and procedures. Members of the training team took initiative in designing evaluation forms, delivery of program materials, and structuring the group learning process.

Over 120 psychiatrists, psychotherapists, counsellors, and relief workers came to the 3-day training program (August 15-17). The majority of the participants are psychiatrists, including senior psychiatrists and heads of departments and service units from the major hospitals serving the earthquake affected areas under the Chengdu jurisdiction. We have practically covered one-third of the professional mental health work force in the area. They are the people who are going to provide ongoing service to the affected population, and form the backbone of the mental health care system.

We followed an experiential learning approach and the majority of program time was devoted to intensive small group case studies, following a conceptual framework that facilitated systematic treatment of the various domains of biology and body, motivation, emotion, cognition, behaviour, and person-environment interaction. The participants showed appreciation of the ecological perspective, and integration of psychosocial analysis with bio-medical knowledge.

The program was learner-centered, and the conceptual model was applied not only to clients or patients but also to the practitioners and the learning process itself. We have also included specialized workshops in the evening on topics such as bereavement work, self-awareness, and community psychiatry. Professional self-care and the management of vicarious trauma were emphasized throughout the program. Many participants have expressed appreciation of the richness and the depth of content coverage, and quite a few felt that they were helped personally and professionally. These participants shared their experience of exhaustion, threat of burnout, and general negativity; and how the program helped them to regain equilibrium, a sense of purpose and pride, as well as energy and momentum.

Members of the training team shared a strong sense of accomplishment and gratification. We all feel connected to our colleagues who have worked in the most aversive and challenging

circumstances; and we all hope that we will be able to provide them with follow up support in terms of case consultation, provision of learning resources, and further training programs. The Chengdu Department of Health hopes that they can send all their professional staff to this training program if we are able to offer it in the future.

If we can repeat the program to cover the entire group, we can then design and deliver more advanced programs to train and develop a core group of practitioners with specialized knowledge and skills. They can then become trainers and consultants to support their colleagues in the system.

Apart from the training programs, members of the training team have met with colleagues from other organizations and academic institutions serving the earthquake victims, including an umbrella organization for NGOs, the Institute of Psychology of the Chinese Academy of Science, University of Hong Kong, Beijing Normal University, and the All China Women Confederation. The magnitude and the extent of the suffering of the earthquake victims (estimated to be around 40 million, more than the entire Canadian population) have tremendous impact on everyone who has engaged with the devastating reality; and there is a shared sense of commitment and readiness to serve. Most of the people we spoke to are thinking of longer term community building and redevelopment. The idea of capacity building is espoused by almost everyone. There is a readiness for long term involvement, collaboration, and innovation. I personally feel humbled by the dedication and hard work of our Chinese colleagues, their insightful observation and analyses of the situation, and the wisdom and creativity reflected in their approach.

I see this as a precious opportunity for knowledge building and mobilization, development of civil society in China, international community-university collaboration, and promotion of interdisciplinary work with social work as a key player.

I am looking forward to meeting with all of you when I get back to Toronto, so that we can explore possible next steps together.

I wish to thank you once again for your support, without which our project would not be possible.

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Professor A. Ka Tat Tsang  
Factor-Inwentash Chair in Social Work in the Global Community  
Director, China Project  
Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto  
246 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario  
Canada M5S 1A1  
Phone: 416-978-5817  
Fax: 416-978-7072  
Website: <http://www.socialwork.utoronto.ca/index.php?section=141>