

SJA China

Distance Learning Project of Disabled Children in Anshan

Background

The city of Anshan locates in the northeast part of China. The population of the city is 3,396,000. Owing the largest steel company, Anshan used to be a city with glory and affluence. It was called “the Capital of Iron and Steel” of the country. But in recent years, many state-owned companies and enterprises got bankrupt or shrunk because of the change from planed-economy to market-economy. In Anshan, many people lost their jobs.



There are about 110,000 people registered with various disabilities in Anshan. The reasons for the disabilities are mainly congenital diseases or injuries from industry or traffic. Like many other places in China, most disabled people in Anshan are living in poverty. Except for those injured in working settings, most disabled people have no fixed income. For these people, they can only live on “the Lowest Life Subsidy” form the government, which is almost not enough for basic need.



On the other hand, most resident and public buildings in the city (or in most parts of China) are not accessible for wheelchairs. So most disabled people with mobility limitations have to stay at home all the time, totally isolated from the society. For those with severe disabilities, they usually cannot afford to pay for somebody to take care of their daily needs. The only caregiver is their families, or aged parents in many cases.



As a result of the undeveloped national welfare system, the basic life of many people with disabilities still can not be met. Many paralyed people cannot afford a wheelchair and have to stay in bed all the time; Many children with hearing impairment can not afford to have a hearing aid, and therefore miss the best time of rehab training. At the same time, other problems occur along with poverty, like lack of education, rehabilitation, and health problem.



In the past several years, great efforts have been made



by Chinese government and Chinese Disabled People’s Federation to help disabled people meet their basic need. But due to the limitation in policy, economy, the concept of the whole society, etc., the result of the efforts is quite limited. People with disabilities have much less support than they should.

In 2005, Dr. Zhang Xu established a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Anshan -- Anshan Bethesda Rehabilitation Ministry. The mission of the Bethesda Ministry is focused on disabled people in the city. Bethesda is a holistic ministry which is dedicated to reaching out to people with disabilities in Anshan, meeting their spiritual, social and physical needs.

SJA Program in Anshan (SJA China)

Due to poverty and mobility limitation, many children with disabilities in Anshan never have chance to access formal education. They also can not go to church or most other public places because of the poor transportation in the city. Comparing to the children of the same age, they have been deprived a lot of life. Anshan Bethesda sensed the great need for helping them to have literacy education and learn the knowledge about their own disabilities and rehabilitation, as well as the great need for their spiritual growth. With the guidance of God and support from St. James Academy, the Bethesda began a new project to help these children -- Distance Learning Project of Disabled Children (SJA China).

The ultimate purpose of the project is to have the lives of these children changed. Because of the disabling condition and other factors, we still could not expect too much for our students, like to have a decent career or to be a doctor or lawyer in the future, but we do expect to see a different life, a life full of Faith, Hope, and Love.

Through our efforts, we hope that these children could learn to read, write; and know more about themselves and their disability. We hope that they could go out of their confining room to have more friends and enjoy the beautiful nature that God has made for



them; But for the most important, we hope they could feel cared and loved, and see the hope and love from Jesus Christ!

Because of limited resources and transportation, it is almost impossible for Bethesda Ministry to educate these children from the urban and rural areas of Anshan in a classroom setting. That is the reason why we conceived the idea of “distance learning”, meaning teaching these children at home by DVD teaching materials. Bethesda Ministry would compile a special curriculum for this “distance learning class”, which includes literacy, Bible studying, knowledge of disabilities and rehabilitation. All learning materials would be made in DVD format.



When the vision became clearer, we began to consider how to find the right students for the program. Our volunteers made the screen and found the first 16 students from our monthly Home Visit program, who are all physically disabled with a smart mind and a strong will to learn. They are living in the different corners of the city and villages around it. They have been confined at home all the time, and never have opportunity to make friends and see the outside world.



With the help of several teachers from GangDu Primary, the best primary in Anshan, we compiled our own SJA China literacy teaching curriculum. It is based on the syllabus of the Primary School Course accredited by Education Ministry of China. We made all the curriculum in DVD format. Our volunteers also made a lot of efforts to collect used textbooks for these children from different local primary schools. We just hope that our students would read and write as well as those children in public schools.



In addition to literacy, we hope that they can also learn some knowledge on their disabilities and rehabilitation, and the knowledge of Bible. With the help of friends in Hong Kong, we managed to have some rehabilitation materials for physical disabilities in DVD format. We still need more rehabilitation teaching materials now. We also found many cartoon Bible story in DVD or VCD format and make them as part of our curriculum.

Bethesda Ministry gives DVD players to students whose family can not afford, which each costs \$40 to \$50 here. We make and mail the learning materials (DVD or VCD) regularly to each student. So they can study at home with the assistance of their parents.

Ms. Kong is the teacher for the program now. She is a christian and a mother of a disabled son. We chose her because her faith to God and her heart for disabled children. Ms. Kong becomes a good friend and “a new mom” to these children. She call them everyday for their progress. She also makes home visits to provide support when there is a need.



To supervise the study progress and help them out, Bethesda Ministry gathers the classmates monthly or at least once two month. During the gathering, we review and discuss what they have learned, and organize games for them. It is also the good opportunity for children and parents to share with each other or get to know new friends. Now we already have 20 children with different physical disabilities in the program.

Apart from learning help, Bethesda also supports these children and families in other aspects, like providing basic life necessities and medical care. Bethesda volunteers often visit these families, bringing with them physical and spiritual support. Our volunteers from hospital regularly visit them and give them physical examination.



Changes already can be seen in the lives of these children. Instead of sitting there wearily and aimlessly, now they become busy everyday with studying new words and other new things; They have new friends and know a lot of new things; They are empowered to have dreams for their future and to raise hope in their hearts, which they never dare to have before. They become confident now, because they can feel the love and care which they never experienced before. And the most important, they begin to know a name - Jesus Christ, the source of all the love and joy they are experiencing.



