



Providing a ray of hope

Charity works to help poor Dongxiang children return to school

By **NAN YU**
China Daily staff

Despite the freezing winds outside and lack of central heating inside, a 30-square-metre classroom at Sanyuanli Primary School was the children, every five of them sharing a 1-metre-long shabby desk, shout out in unison as the teacher points to Chinese characters she has written on a cracked blackboard.

This primary school is located in Kaole Township in the Dongxiang Autonomous County in Northwest China's Gansu Province, one of the poorest in the province.

With seven classrooms, the school is in an old one-storey building with uneven walls. There are 10 teachers for 455 children in five grades.

Over 150 new students were enrolled this year, said school headmaster Ma Zhanying. But despite the overcrowded conditions, he is happy to see that more and more families in this destitute area send their children to learn.

Finding space for the new students has been difficult, Ma said.

"We have already turned a meeting room for teachers into a classroom for Grade Five," he said. "But we still don't have enough money to buy desks and chairs for every student, let alone build new classrooms."

The Sanyuanli school and hundreds like it in the county are a ray of hope for families of the Muslim Dongxiang people, one of China's 56 ethnic groups.

Seeing the urgent need to help schools like Sanyuanli, last month China Daily and the China Youth Development Foundation teamed up to form donations are collected either to build a new school or enlarge an existing school to ease crowded conditions such as at Sanyuanli.

"About 200,000 yuan (US\$24,180) can help enlarge and furnish one existing school and 300,000 yuan (US\$36,400) can help build a new one," said Xue Chaohua, a staff member at China Daily, who has visited and investigated more than 20 local primary schools over one-and-a-half months this year.

Dongxiang county has a population of 257,800, most of whom make a living by growing wheat and potatoes and herding sheep. With an annual per capita income of 776 yuan (US\$93.5), the county has also suffered from a continuous drought for many years.

Many families use rainwater, collected as it flows off their roofs, for drinking water for themselves and their livestock.

Those who live where it rarely rains often have to travel over 10 kilometres every day to collect water, which they carry back to their villages on a donkey or on their own backs.

"The shortage of water has

blocked Dongxiang's agricultural and industrial development," said Qi Xiufang, the vice-magistrate of the county.

Farmers are concerned that their children won't receive proper education.

"My oldest son will be six years old next year and I don't know where I can get the money children.

Tuo lives in Chitan Village in Fengling Township. His annual harvest is barely enough to feed his family.

"Among the 50 families I visited in Kaole Township, 49 said they wanted to send their children to school," said China Daily's Xue. "But most of them cannot afford fees for textbooks and expenses, even though they only amount to 45 yuan (US\$5.46) for one term."

Because school costs are hard to meet, many children only receive five years of primary school training or drop out of school.

Xue also found that 21 out of the 50 families in that area didn't want to send their daughters to school.

"Girls usually learn the Koran in nearby mosques for two or three years and then return home to help on the farm or with household chores and wait for marriage," he said. "Most of villages are hidden away in remote mountains and it's unsafe for a young child to walk 10 kilometres to school every day. They also can't afford the expenses of having their children

board at the school."

In Wangjiano Village in Fengling Township, all the 20 school-age children from the 17 families cannot go to school because the nearest is 20 kilometres away. It would take about two hours for the children to get there.

"Under such harsh natural we can help most," Xue said.

China Daily is working with Dongxiang county, following a campaign launched by the central government calling for public assistance in the battle against poverty in poor counties since 1998.

Its aid has helped establish the China Daily Hope School which opened in 2000 with nearly 500,000 yuan (US\$60,000) in donations from employees at China Daily and the Gansu Association for Disabled People and local people.

The school has proved to be a great success and has attracted 386 students from four villages. About 95 per cent of the area's school-age children are now re-

ceiving education compared with 1998's figure of only 47 per cent.

Moreover, previously there were only four girls at the school, and now there are 83.

"Thanks to China Daily and all the other people, we can sit in such bright classroom and study," said Ma Yan, 11, who is in Grade Five and is preparing is located in Yanling, only half an hour away from the county seat. Residents in Yanling are slightly better off than residents who live in deep ravines, Xue said.

"New donations will be used to assist or build schools in much poorer townships like those around the Sanyuanli Primary School," Xue said.

"If you could see those students sitting and squatting on the ground practising writing and reading books, or the teachers who live in rundown buildings with holes in the ceilings, or the tiny and thin figures carrying little bags as they disappear among the huge mountains, you wouldn't hesitate to help them."

The names of donors whose personal donations are over 1,000 yuan (US\$122) or corporate donations are over 10,000 yuan (US\$1,214), will be carved on a monument at the new school.

China Daily will also have a special column to follow the development of the China Daily Hope School.

China Daily and the China Youth Development Foundation will also organize China Daily readers and some donors to go on visits to Dongxiang during construction.

For donations or further information about the project, please contact the China Youth Development Foundation at (86-10) 64033904 or (86-10) 64035547.

WHAT'S ON

Acrobatic Show

Chaoyang Theatre is a theatre which specializes in acrobatics all the year round. Many top acrobatic artists from all over the country are invited to perform for the Chinese and foreign tourists.

Venue: Chaoyang Theatre, 36 Dongsanhuan Beilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing

Time: 7:15 pm, nightly Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

China National Acrobatic Circus

China National Acrobatic Circus was the first State-level acrobatic troupe of New China and has won lots of gold medals in various well-known international acrobatic contests in places such as Monaco, France, Hungary, Russia and Italy. Now the star-studded cast are exhibiting the charm and elegance of the most professional comprehensive acrobatic art every night. Integrating superlative juggling, unicycling, balancing and jumping through hoops with the finest ancient Chinese dancing, the award-winning variety show will amaze you at every turn.

Time/Dates: 19:15 - 20:30, every evening
Location: Universe Theatre, 10 Dongzhimen Nandajie, Dongcheng District (100 metres north of Poly Plaza)
Tel: 6502 3984, 6502 2649, 6416 9893 Fax: 6500 2743

Paris" is a musical interpretation of Victor Hugo's classic story that will play in Beijing.

With a score by Richard Cocciante, lyrics by Luc Plamondon, choreography by Martino Muller and directed by Gilles Maheu, the production has taken Europe, the United States and Canada by storm since its premiere in Paris in September, 1999.

Its soundtrack was put on the market in 1998 to an overwhelming and rapturous response. Since then the album has sold over 7 million copies in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Canada and remained at No 1 on the French charts for 17 weeks.
Time: 7:30 pm, December 20-24
Place: The Great Hall of the People
Tel: 6851-1556, 6851-1557

Xuanwu District
Tel: 6301-6688 ext 8867

Monkey King: Two Peking Opera excerpts, one focusing on the Monkey King, are being performed every evening at the Zhengyici Theatre.

"The Broken Bridge" and "Eighteen Arhats Fight the Monkey King" are featured on Fridays.

On Saturdays, there is "Picking up the Jade Bracelet" and "Havoc in the Dragon's Palace."

On Sundays, "Farewell My Concubine" and "Monkey King's Havoc in Heaven" are the featured pieces.

Time: 7:30 pm, daily
Place: Zhengyici Theatre
Tel: 1362-119-5714

EXHIBITIONS

Remembering hutong: The Wanfung Art Gallery is to hold a one-man show of Kuang Han's pencil

Petrochemical Publishing House.
Time: 9 am-4 pm, December 21-31
Place: 136 Nanchizi Dajie, Dongcheng District
Tel: 6523-3320

Sculptures unearthed: A total of 108 precious Buddhist sculptures unearthed in Qingzhou in East China's Shandong Province are on show at China Millennium Monument.

Most exhibits come from the collection of Qingzhou Museum which houses the results of an excavation in October 1996. The pieces range from the year 529 to 1026. The miniature Buddhist sculptures are exquisitely crafted with colour painting and a precious materials coating still visible after thousands of years.
Time: 9 am-5 pm until February 8
Place: 9A Fuxing Lu
Tel: 6857-3281

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