

Giving, Receiving and Sharing

The traineeship report of Cathy (Gao, Ning from P.R.China) at CGC

With heavy snow and freezing air, the winter of 2008 is extremely cold in China; but, spent in India, this is the warmest winter ever in my life---- not only because of the weather, more importantly, it is the people I met and the experience I had that matter. When I look back, all those sweet or bitter memories come out and remind me that, in the past month, although what I've been through is not at all *perfect*, it is great enough to be the treasure of my whole life. I learnt to give love generously, to be tolerant, to sacrifice, and in return, received friendship, trust and happiness.

It was at the end of January that I joined the big family of CGC, which, as far as I knew at that time, is an NGO that generously gives help to kids who are neglected by their family and the society. After being introduced the programs running by the organization, I chose to involve in "Happy Home" for homeless children and "Toby School" for the mentally challenged. Since a considerably number of the "Happy Home" kids are normal and attend common school at the daytime, so my plan is that working in Toby School from nine thirty to three thirty in the afternoon, and spend time with "Happy Home" kids afterwards till night. Now I can tell confidently that, with little modification, this plan actually works. The main working experience will be stated as follows.

Toby School: the Key is Communication

As a 19-year-old sophomore who is not in the major of education and have only attended courses like "Guide to Education" and "Guide to Psychology", I have to admit, to be very honest, that my first day in Toby School was not that pleasant. Kids are very curious about me--- the newcomer, and keep looking at me with their clear big eyes, as to me, at the same time, also want to know as much as possible about them---- the problem is, except smiling and saying "hi", I can barely communicate with them!! After discussing the problem with Madam Sheela, I find out that there are two main obstacles for me to communicate with Toby School children: one is language, different mother tongues (Telugu and Chinese) and poor English education of the kids leave a very limited space for our communication; the other is that with a different appearance (clothes, hair, skin color etc.), I am not instinctively accepted by them. Of course, the fact that most kids are mentally challenged makes things harder.

To solve above problems, to be the kids' friend, and to involve in them as much as I can, I take the following steps, which actually effect quite well. First things first, I read the kids' files in order to have a basic knowledge of them. The essential is, to remember everyone's name! This "name remembering" effort helps a lot in eliminating the distance between me and the kids; it also works well with the Happy Home kids and even the college girls. I can confidently say that till now, I know the name of every Toby School and Happy Home kid. Second, since during successful communication there need to be one side active, and apparently I cannot ask the kids to change for me, so I have to be the one who brings positive improvement. On one hand, to tackle the language problem, I pick up some simple Telugu which may help express my ideas (e.g. how are you? / Fine, thank you. / Sit down, please. / Come here. / What's your name? / My name is ... / Look! / Keep it here. etc.). On the other hand, I try my best to leave kids the impression of "Cathy Akka", that is to say, I'm their sister, their friend, but not only their "teacher" or anything else.

After all these efforts, communication is no longer the biggest problem and it's time for the actual "work". Teachers at Toby School are experienced in educating the special kids, they are patient and willing to show me how the things work, thus, I can learn some new methods almost everyday. For each kid, there are goals of different period, ranging from a week to a whole year. The aim I set for myself is to get to know these goals, say, the three-month goals, and help the kids to achieve them (mainly of English and Math subject). Considering that the smallest kids are the easiest to "deal with", I spent the first week with Ruth teacher in the pre-primary class of which kids' ages range from four to eight. What I teach them in class is actually very simple, such as writing their basic information (names, parents' names, school's name, teacher's name etc.), identifying colors, fruits' names, vegetables' names and meaningful counting. But when it comes to the special kids of young age, there are a number of points to consider

when teaching, what really matters is the method! From my experience, the key points are: 1. try to make the teaching process interesting--- besides writing, drawing, matching, coloring and all kinds of movements are applied to catch the attention of them; 2. give them a rest every ten or fifteen minutes--- this is because of the limit of their attention time; 3. use praise generously when the kids achieve something new--- if they do the job excellent, I'll give them a candy as rewards; 4. keep repeating what they've learnt--- my own study experience tells me that the best method of memorizing is repeating, so as to the Toby School kids. The pre-primary kids spend afternoons playing and doing sports, apart from involving in their old games, I introduced them a new one--- Eagle VS Chicken, which is quite common among Chinese kids. Thanks to the game, we had so much fun and get closer and closer.

My second week at Toby School was spent at primary-A classroom with Kalavathi teacher and girls of all ages. I used pretty much the similar ways in class. The girls are good dancers, in the spare time, they showed me Indian dance with music. Not good at dance myself, I taught them "Rabbit Dance", simple but popular in China. Interestingly, in unexpected effect of the dance is that, it gives the girls a basic concept of "left" and "right".

Generously giving me help of work and life, Madam Sheela is definitely MY teacher also at Toby School. I spent the rest of time of my internship at primary B class with her and Pushpa Madam. This class has the most kids, and the brain damage of some of them is considerably profound. She showed me the different methods dealing with students of different situation and helped me when I cannot express my ideas properly. I assisted her in checking the progress of the kids and teaching them new stuff. To some "mild" students (Vishnu, for example), I taught them complex things like additions with carryover; while to the "severe" kids (Sudheer, for example), I let them copy their own names and draw pictures for them to color; there are also a few kids like Juneid who cannot receive much information, to this kind I learnt from Sheela Madam that just simply sit beside them and call their names to catch their attention, or training them basic living skills like washing hands after toilet.

I try to involve as much as possible in the kids by learning with them, playing with them, serving them meals and preparing for the competitions "The Carnival" and the one on Feb 29th together with them. I learnt Indian songs, dances, drum beating, and most importantly, I learnt to take care of others with patience and had an incredibly great time. When in "the Carnival" I heard that Kajol, the little girl whom I dressed up as "Miss India" won the first prize in the fancy dress competition, it suddenly appeared to me that how meaningful it is to giving and receiving love, only this kind of joy can last forever.

And of course, I owe a big "Thank you" to Madam Sheela, Kalavathi teacher and Ruth teacher, who generously give love and care to the Toby School kids and me as well. I've learnt a lot and received kindest help from every one of them. It's an amazing experience to work with them!

At the end of the Toby School part, I would love to share my favorite two points: Every kid is unique and cannot be compared to each other; for once and always, we have to stand in the kids' shoes.

Happy Home: I'm your Cathy Akka!

Except when they do not have school, mostly I spent time with other Happy Home kids from three thirty in the afternoon till night. At first, I worried a lot and did much preparation, and collected the stories of the kids from other CGCers. Once I got to know them, I was deeply impressed by these active, naïve, clever and very adorable children. They are well educated, so most of the times we can communicate quite well. Laugh and tears, there are so many touching moments. We share stories of our nations: they tell me their life in Indian, in CGC, in Betty Huber Home, about the school life, spare time, festivals, clothes (with girls, of course) and sports; I portray them the city life in China, the university studies, Chinese food, my hobbies and my family. We play together: the Out-Out game, the five-stone game, the ring-ring game, passing words, and my favorite, badminton. They teach me Telugu, and I read English stories for them, and tell them the pronunciation of my Chinese name. We study together: for the eighth-class girls, I solve math problems; for the Lingapur boys, I help them in English. We eat together; we pray together, we live together... There are many more "together", and it's just all these "together" consist of the sweet memory we share. Thanks to Pushpa, her accompany polishes my whole experience with Happy Home kids, filling it with songs, dances and laughs, and of course, helps a lot in English-Telugu communication.

When I'm alone, these voices will constantly sound around my ears: "Good Night, Cathy Akka!" "Sister, come!" "Hello, Akka!" Those kids, their smile (as bright as the sunshine), their kindness, and their trust make me feel so lucky to meet them. As a single child in the family, I've already considered the Happy Home kids my dearest sisters and brothers. Undoubtedly, I'll miss them after returning to China.

Although my work here doesn't have direct relationship with the college students, I spent some time studying in the hall with the girls and like them a lot. Of similar ages, we have many common subjects to talk. We play badminton together, and roast sweet potatoes on weekends. It's really nice meeting them.

Other CGCers: friendship has no limit of nation

Another group of people I have to mention is my colleagues, whom I prefer to call as CGCers. I spent almost 24-7 at BHH with those CGCers: Mary, Jayne, Malathi, Pushpa, and has developed close friendship with them. They are zealous, friendly, and have shown great interest in me and Chinese culture. Fully respecting my habit, they made great effort to let me feel comfortable both in life and work.

For the past month, they were like family to me. Whenever there's trouble at work, they stand my side and try to help me fix things up. Whenever I feel lonely, they spent time chatting with me for hours trying to cheer me up. Whenever I have homesick, they are the ones who offer me warm hugs. At the beginning, I felt hard to adjust in the brand new situation and desperately wanted to meet my friends in the city, they understood my feelings well and even arranged the transport for me. When I showed interest in the famous Charminar, again Sathivani came and accompanied me through my sightseeing, and took me shopping at the Laad Bazaar as well. I have to say, without their help, there's no way I can adapt to my new life within a short time, have a deep impression of Indian culture and enjoy my traineeship this much. The friendship with them is beyond the limit of nation, language, and absolutely a precious treasure of my trip. Besides, the helpers in BHH: Balu, Lakshmi, Sonthosha, Bolamma guaranteed a comfortable life for me, they deserve a sincere "thank you!"

I consider myself as one of the a few lucky foreigners who can actually experience the original Indian lifestyle. The spicy but delicious Indian food (dal, curry, biryani etc.), the colorful Indian dress, beautiful although hard to pronounce Indian names, splendid Indian songs and dances, hospitable Indian people, grand Indian buildings, pretty Indian accessories... every one of them have successfully caught my eyes and left me deep expression, the fancy Indian culture will keep in my memory for good.

During my internship, the key word is Love. The love from all the CGCers to the children, the love from the children to their parent-like "akkas", the love I received, I gave and we shared. When it comes to love, there's no need of common language because love itself is the most beautiful language shared by all human beings. The obstacle in language kind of helped, for it let me use my eyes better to observe more, and my heart better to feel more, love more.

There's never a good way to say goodbye. When the limit of time reminds me to leave, I surprisingly find out, that within only a months' time, there are already so many memories blossoming in BHH, our home. It's a pity that I don't have chance to see more, learn more and experience more. But thanks to CGC, my experience in India becomes so special and precious. It doesn't matter about the time; it's the people I've met, the stories we've been through that play the most important role. (Feb 23rd, 2008)