



BREAKING STEREOTYPES

- ◆ "Mum, no worries! I will support you and dad."
- ◆ Precise training targeting market demand
- ◆ Developing talented people for ourselves
- ◆ Inclusion has its roots here



愛德基金會
THE AMITY FOUNDATION

Published by the Amity Foundation

Printed by Amity Printing Co., Ltd.

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ON THE COVER:

Yifeng, a senior high school student from Qiandongnan Ethnic Special Education High School, is showing a teapot made by him.





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Reunion and outlook



Ling Chunxiang

General Secretary
The Amity Foundation



Reunion and Outlook were the guiding principles of this quarter's activities.

The third meeting of the fourth Board of Directors set new goals and directions for the development and progress of the organization; Visitors from all walks of life were welcomed to a capacity building camp held at Amity Headquarters for grassroots social organizations to promote sector development; With the lifting of social distancing restrictions, We held our Open Day for the first time in three years, inviting friends who are interested in charity to visit and learn more about Amity.

In addition to welcoming visitors, Amity has actively organized excursions in this quarter: The Jiangsu NGO International Exchange and Cooperation Alliance was established, with Amity became the first rotating chair of the alliance; The European Network of Amity Partners roundtable was held in Finland, after which Amity's delegation visited a number of international organizations and social service agencies in Finland, Switzerland and Germany.

Despite encountering many challenges and restrictions in the past 3 years, Amity's staff never stopped innovating and

gaining momentum, ready to act at the nearest opportunity.

As the doors to international cooperation gradually reopen after the pandemic, Amity is ready to embrace old and new friends with renewed confidence and vigour, relishing the prospect of continuing to work together in the future.

Breaking stereotypes

On May 15, 2023, the Blue Book on the Cause of People with Disabilities: Research Report on the Cause of People with Disabilities in China (2023) was released in Beijing. According to the report, the employment of people with disabilities has been an important driving factor of government policy, leading to increased employment proportion and improved employment quality. By the end of 2022, 9 million certified people with disabilities were employed in urban and rural areas.

The efforts of social organizations have also contributed to these encouraging figures, including those of The Amity Foundation.

At the Qiandongnan Ethnic Special Education Senior High School, young people constantly hone their skills as they aspire to enter society under Amity's support.



“Mum, no worries! I will support you and dad.”



Ms. Wang, who had just had a heart surgery referred to her son Yifeng's handiwork with pride and joy: "I couldn't believe at first that he had made it himself. It was incredible."

Yifeng, 21 years old, is a senior high school student in Qiandongnan Ethnic Special Education High School. Yifeng suffers from dysarthria, a speech disorder which makes it difficult for him to articulate his words clearly, due to weakened speech muscles.

Yifeng's condition created significant challenges to his development and learning. However, due to financial circumstances, Ms. Wang and her husband could not afford to give Yifeng timely intervention, so he would often be misunderstood or neglected at school. His parents felt considerable guilt over his situation but were powerless to help.

"We were very worried," said Ms. Wang. "After he graduates from school, where can he go? If there is no place to accommodate

him, he can only stay at home. What if one day we pass away, how will he manage without us?"

"Grow up safely" is the only hope that Ms. Wang had for Yifeng. "We dared not wish for more."

Since enrolling at the special education high school, Yifeng's life took a turn for the better: under the professional guidance of the teachers, Yifeng systematically learned sign language, which greatly improved his ability to process and convey information. This opened the door to many new possibilities.

With the encouragement of his teachers, Yifeng chose the pottery training class offered by the school. He has since fallen in love with the craft, and is often seen working on his projects in the training room for hours. Pottery teacher Yang Shenghua tells us that Yifeng has great potential: he is calm, diligent, focused, and attentive to detail.

In Ms. Wang's view, learning pottery has changed her son greatly. "He has clearly grown more confident! I was worried at first that he wouldn't be able to manage it, but when he came home for the holidays, he took my hand and told me, with great effort and earnestness, 'Mom... No, no worries... I am... slow... slow... but I... will support you... and... Dad with the teapots... I make'" Ms. Wang's eyes shone hope.

"I am so thankful to the Special Education High School and the teachers there... without them, my son could not have found his way!"



► Yifeng is learning pottery under the guidance of his teacher Mr. Yang



► Chang Hongxin (second from right) participated in a training organized by Amity in Taipei in 2016

Precise training targeting market demand

"Many students in our school are ready to enter society. I hope more companies will provide employment opportunities for our children." This is the message expressed by Chang Hongxin again and again in public occasions over the recent years.

Hongxin is a member of Qiandongnan Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and principal of Qiandongnan Special Education High School. With a gentle personality, she has been working in special education for nearly 30 years since her

graduation in 1994. She has been committed to helping these students enter society and become self-reliant through special education.

Her journey was filled with challenges.

"In the past, we focused on training our students to be able to take the college entrance examinations. While offering regular courses like other schools, we also provided some skill-based training for these special students." However, the number of students who were successfully admitted to the university were very limited. For the majority who failed, their education level and professional skills were lacking in competitiveness in the job market.

Hongxin thinks the problem lies in disconnect between the jobseekers and employers.

"Admittedly, we don't know enough about the current job market. But the market knows

even less about the potential and abilities of our children." As a result of this disconnect, many employers feel that people with disabilities can't meet their job requirements. "In fact, this is not the case," Hongxin said with certainty. Nevertheless, many students still can't shake the market's "stereotype" on the group.

"I think we should become market oriented, building a bridge between our students and the job market," said Hongxin. Since 2015, the Qiandongnan Special Education High School has offered vocational education classes, specializing in a variety of traditional handicraft and artwork. In recent years, more

majors like clothing design and technology, baking and other majors have been added to the selection.

According to Hongxin, these majors not only can reflect the ethnic and artistic culture of Qiandongnan, but also meet the demand of employers in these fields. "Our students generally have better execution and unique innovation. Once they receive the right training, they will be able to meet these needs very well."

Yong, 21, is a pottery student like Yifeng. Yong excels at pottery, and won the fourth place in the 2022 Guizhou Skills Competition for People with Disabilities. Shishi, 16, is



majoring in fashion design and craft. She is proficient in sewing, embroidery and batik. Yibing, 18, is learning embroidery. She hopes to combine embroidery and fashion design to make a unique collection.

These students, like Yifeng, have different types or degrees of disabilities. Once upon a time, the only hope of their parents was to keep them "safe and alive". But now, they are formidable "dark horses" in the labor market.

In her opinion, expanding the cooperation between schools and companies will help bring more such talent to society. Over the years, Hongxin and her team spared no effort in

outreach, taking the students to competitions and exhibitions, attracting companies, and signing internship or employment agreements. At the same time, the team also make efforts in procuring external training and educative experiences for their students. Companies in the field are invited to employ on campus before official employment, so as to give the students more opportunities

Still, it is challenging to shift from the training students to brokering partnership with companies, as many stereotypes still exist. Yet, Hongxin and her team never gave up, empowered by the continued support of the Amity Foundation.

In the same year that the school started its vocational education class, the Amity Foundation's "Inclusive Classroom - Vocational Training for Youth with Disabilities" project was launched in the school. Over the past eight years, the Amity project supported the purchase of teaching aids, the update of facilities, the training of teachers, the skill competition of students, the compilation of textbooks and the provision of resources. In addition to improving the school system and the development of students, Amity sets up platforms for teachers and students to support special education practitioners like Hongxin to learn new ideas and new methods.



"I think the biggest role of the Amity project is to 'push' things into motion. The implementation of the project has driven us to update our concepts and methods, and supported us to get resources, explore a vocational education system with regional characteristics and regional advantages, and effectively improve the social competitiveness of students with disabilities."



► Mud whistle made by the students



► Pieces of embroidery



Developing talented people for ourselves

Jin Xiuli is one of the earliest employers to partner with the Qiandongnan Special Education High School. A skilled artisan, she has won accolades such as "Senior Arts and Crafts Artist of Guizhou Province", "Master of Arts and Crafts of Qiandongnan Prefecture" and "Non-heritage Inheritor of Batik". Xiuli also founded Qiandongnan Prefecture Yangyou Ethnic Crafts Co., Ltd., one of the training bases of the special education high school.

In 2015, Xiuli was invited to the Qiandongnan Special Education High School to be a batik teacher. At the beginning, she was uncertain as to whether students with disabilities could make it into the profession. Despite Xiuli's limited experience in working with people with disabilities, she resolved to give it a try.

As Xiuli interacted more, she developed a greater understanding of their situation. "They are just like ordinary students in many aspects", she said. "Sometimes I even feel that they are particularly suitable for batik!" Batik is a complex skill that needs a lot of patience. Students with disabilities, especially those with hearing impairment, are particularly focused and thus make great batik practitioners

Xiuli realized that sometimes "setbacks" can also be turned into "advantages".

Batik as a skill is difficult to teach and learn from scratch. Xiuli would choose to slow down the pace of her teaching whenever her students found things too overwhelming. She has also designed games to simplify the



batik-making process and arouse students' interest in learning.

"In terms of practical operation, I would guide them through making the simplest line drawings, then to drawing circles, setting up models, pattern design, painting with wax, and so on." Gradually, Xiuli developed a teaching system for disabled students new to batik.

Under Xiuli's guidance, a number of her students' projects have now been turned into works of art. Xiuli aims to help the students earn money with their creations, helping them gain confidence in batik for a living after graduation. "Our next step is to help our students turn their

works into marketable products. We are developing talented people for our company."

Xiuli has also recommended these works to her peers, trying to open more employment windows for the students: "Our local batik, embroidery and other industries find it difficult to recruit people while students struggle to find jobs." I want to use my own experience to convince employers that people with disabilities have the ability to meet industry requirements and alleviate the employment gap."

Xiuli admitted that accepting people with disabilities for employment brings certain challenges for companies, such

as communicating with hearing-impaired employees. But in her opinion, these are problems that can be solved, and will not affect the productivity of a company. "When I first taught at the special education high school, I did not understand the students at all and could not use sign language. I relied solely on the sign language teacher to translate." Now, although her sign language skills are still limited, she can communicate and teach smoothly by writing and using body language, because she has formed a tacit understanding with the students."

Xiuli's younger sister, Jin Li, also teaches at the school. As a famous embroidery expert in Qiandongnan Prefecture, Jin Li founded the Kaili Meixiang Embroidery Factory. Today, Jin Li teaches embroidery at Qiandongnan Special Education High School and her company is one of the training bases of the school. The sisters are loved and respected by the students.

"I feel honored to cooperate with the Qiandongnan Prefecture Special Education High School. I'm not much older than these students, and I get along like a sister with them. I applaud such cooperation between school and companies. We are also cultivating talented people for our own companies." Jin Li said with a smile.

The sisters both mentioned "developing talented people for themselves", much to the joy of Chang Hongxin: "Both of us see a 'win-win' situation in this project. Companies used to accept students with disabilities out of sympathy and compassion, but today they no longer lower their requirements on our students during the hiring process. This is true acceptance, recognition and respect."



Inclusion has its roots here

To many, promoting local social attention and support for the employment of people with disabilities in the less-developed areas of western China.

However, Shen Yulin, an expert in social welfare for people with disabilities, is more optimistic. Shen was the editor of *Modern Special Education* magazine and a member of the compilation team for the university textbook "Introduction to Deaf Culture". In addition, he has extensively collaborated with the Amity Foundation in various projects, such as the Bilingual Deaf Education Experiment since 1998. In his experience, the diversity of ethnic minorities in the western region has historically enabled cultural and social integration. Thanks to this, while the social inclusion of people with disabilities in western regions is a relatively new initiative and still needs more material and technical

support, new ideas and methods can often take root faster thanks to."

Qiandongnan Prefecture is also known as "the hometown of one hundred festivals" as it is home to many ethnic minority groups such as Miao and Dong. More than 200 festivals are held here every year, including singing and dancing, bullfighting, horse racing, dragon boat racing, dragon lanterns and Dong opera.

In Shen's view, the people there are used to different ethnic languages, cultures and traditions. With proper guidance, it would be easier for the local people to accept people with disabilities who have different ways to express themselves. Shen cites people with hearing impairment as an example. In a community used to hearing and speaking a myriad of different dialects, sign language is more likely to be accepted and normalized as just another

means of communication. Thus if more institutions like the Qiandongnan Special Education High School support people with hearing impairment to improve their skills and competence, more companies may be willing to employ employees with hearing impairment."

In 2020, a new vocational training building of Qiandongnan Special Education High School was completed with the support of Amity and its partners. The slogan "Learn a skill, build a life." is emblazoned on the building's outer wall. To Chang Hongxin, this is a powerful reminder that more and more students there are building their lives. "What they need is a place to apply their skills upon leaving school."

"With our help and acceptance, they can thrive. I'm sure of it."

The 4th "Amity Cup" table tennis tournament was held in Nanjing

From April 1st to 2nd, the Amity Foundation and partners jointly organized the fourth "Amity Cup" in Nanjing, a table tennis tournament aimed to raise awareness and funds for the "Amity Cup Care for Children of the Stars" program.

The event attracted 108 table tennis teams across the country, divided into youth group, middle-aged group and senior group. Li Ju, an Olympic champion, and Liu Jing, a Paralympic table tennis champion and beneficiary of Amity's "House of Hope" served as the image ambassadors of the event.







ENAP Conference reunites friends of Amity

From 29 May to 11 June 2023, a delegation of core members of the Amity Foundation embarked on a 14-day-tour of Europe, visiting many partner organizations across the continent for the first time since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Led by Board Chair Qiu Zhonghui and Secretary-General Ling Chunxiang, Amity's delegation held the European Network of Amity Partners (ENAP) Conference in Helsinki, which was graciously hosted by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (Felm). Representatives from 11 long-time Amity partners across 5 countries attended the conference, during which Amity shared its development and diakonia work. In turn, the members of ENAP outlined their work and discussed the changes in the landscape of humanitarian work in



their respective countries over the past 3 years. The offline conference offered the opportunity for Amity to thank the members of ENAP in person for their support and recognition during the trying times of yesteryear. Mr. Qiu expressed his hopes that the event will set a new stage of development for the Foundation's future collaborations with its European partners, calling for more diverse international projects and regular exchange of ideas, information and experiences in the field going forward.



Following the conference, Amity's delegation went on to visit key partner organizations in Switzerland and Germany, holding meetings with leaders of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). In Germany, apart from visiting Protestant Agency for Diakonie and Development (EWDE), Amity also visited Bavarian YWCA. Amity's visit to Europe coincided with The Church Day (Kirchentag) convention, where Amity representatives met with a great number of partner organization representatives and participated in a series of Kirchentag activities. The trip has reconnected Amity with many partner organizations and churches, keeping the torch of goodwill aflame for many years to come.



Established in 1987, the European Network of Amity Partners (ENAP) is one of the earliest international partner networks of the Amity Foundation. Over the years, this network of social organizations has provided invaluable support to Amity's projects and developments in the field of Chinese social work. ENAP continues to play an active role in organizing exchanges and promoting world peace and development under the principle of Love in Action.



Amity awarded 2022 Excellent Organization of the Year

On June 15, the Weibo "Spread and Link Goodwill" Charity Sector Exchange Conference was held in Beijing. The Amity Foundation won the "2022 Excellent Organization of the Year" Award under the Civic Footprint Index jointly created by Weibo and the Institute for Philanthropy of Tsinghua University.

The Index reflects the effectiveness and impact of an organization's internet communications, to identify social organizations with strong public influence, call for social organizations to use communication tools, and promote a charity ecology in which everyone participates.

Amity became rotating Chairmanship Organization of Jiangsu NGO Network for International Exchange and Cooperation

On May 16, the establishment ceremony of the Jiangsu NGO Network for International Exchange and Cooperation ("Jiangsu NGO Network") and the Social Organization International Exchange and Cooperation Capacity Building Training was held in Yancheng, Jiangsu Province.



The Jiangsu NGO Network was established to promote the Global Development Initiative and to support social organizations in Jiangsu in foreign exchanges and cooperation under the Belt and Road initiative. A total of 33 Jiangsu social organizations became the first members of the Network. At the ceremony, it was announced that the Amity Foundation would serve as the rotating Chairmanship Organization of Jiangsu NGO Network, and Qiu Zhonghui, Chair of the Board of Amity, became the rotating Chairperson of the Network. It was also announced that the Network Secretariat would be stationed at the Amity Foundation Headquarters.

The Jiangsu NGO Network would be a platform to share information and resources, promote capacity building and provide professional services for its members.





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