Role of Community Youth Volunteers in rehabilitation of people affected by leprosy: a case study from China

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Accepted for publication 01 November 2010

Case Report

Wukang Leprosarium is located in the eastern part of Zhejiang, China in a valley far away from the county town. A girl was born in this colony, the daughter of a person seriously disabled by leprosy. She was left there as her parents were unable to look after her. A Youth Volunteer group was established to help children in the centre, and members included the young staff in the colony and people from the nearby community. The group brought the girl to the school for enrolment, but because of stigma towards leprosy, the local school staff opposed the girl’s entry to school. They said that the girl and her mother were unregistered residents and that she should go to study in her permitted residence area. Considering the above conditions, the young volunteers had to find another way to solve the enrolment problem.

The girl’s permitted residence was in Sanmen County, Zhejiang, China, where her father lived, about 300 kilometers away. The young volunteers wondered how to help the girl return to her father’s home and study in the local school. Her father told them of his poor economic status. The young volunteers had sought the help of the government and the charity of the county, but they failed. They tried to seek resources through the internet and attracted the attention of the Student Union of Zhejiang University of Science and Technology. When they heard the story of the girl, they were very interested and decided to help her with funds, agreeing to sponsor her for as long as was necessary. The girl eventually returned home and studied happily in the local primary school. It was only the first step in her career. Her story was only just beginning.

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Children of people affected by leprosy face many difficulties. They lack income and are dependent on their disabled parents, but because their parents suffer from leprosy, they may be stigmatised by the community. Most of them cannot complete their education and have no vocational skills to find a job.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Mrs Chunzhi Pan, who works in the China Leprosy Association, for her encouragement to report the case. We also thank the girl and her parents, who allowed the report to be prepared, and hoped the success story would help more children in the colony return to society and have access to school.

References