



SUPPORT EDUCATION IN RURAL CHINA PROGRAM SERIES

認助中國鄉村教育項目系列

2007 Annual Report

NBC Nightly News Features Dr. Chiao and ESS/SERC

On October 19, 2007, Dr. Lungching Chiao, ESS, and the Support Education for Rural China (SERC) Programs were featured in “*Making a Difference*”, the NBC Nightly News segment that focuses on exceptional individuals who pursue causes that directly “make a difference” in the lives of others.



Part of a week-long special series on “China Rising”, the October 19th NBC segment recounts how Dr. Chiao, an educator from Virginia, initiated the SERC programs some twenty years ago with support from ESS and a group of volunteers. Starting with one school library in rural China, the program has now set up over 4,500 libraries across the country. In addition, the SERC programs also conduct workshops for rural teachers, and provide scholarships to rural students. The work of Dr. Chiao and the ESS volunteers has changed the lives of many rural children, including a former SERC scholarship recipient, Mr. Fu Changshan, who has been inspired to return to his home village to teach. Mark Mullen, NBC reporter for the series, concludes that, for Dr. Chiao and the group she leads, “. . . perhaps the most welcome tribute takes place . . . the moment a student shares knowledge from a donated book with appreciative classmates.”

NBC began shooting the ESS story in June 2007, starting with an ESS meeting in McLean, VA. That was followed by two trips to China in July and September. On the first trip, the NBC team joined ESS in the Teacher Training Conference in Hefei (Anhui Province) and visited a rural primary school that had received library books under the *Adopt a Rural School Library* project. The second trip took the team to a remote school in Tianzhu County, Gansu, located high up on the mountains about five hours drive from Lanzhou. Arriving in the midst of a snowfall, the team filmed activities in the school (which has received books and musical instruments under the SERC programs) and interviewed Mr. Fu Changshan.

After the airing of the NBC program segment, ESS has received many positive comments, including inquiries from US-based nonprofit organizations working on India and Africa, requesting information on ESS experience in promoting basic education in poor communities.

The NBC segment can be viewed on the ESS website, www.esscare.org.

Support Education in Rural China (SERC) Program Series

2007 Annual Report

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Education and Science Society, Inc. (ESS) is a non-profit, non-political educational organization, registered as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization in the State of New York. Its missions are to promote understanding between the peoples of the United States and China, and to promote human and social development in rural China by raising literacy levels and improving the quality of education.



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The ESS Board of Directors holds regular meetings every quarter and the SERC Executive Committee holds regular meetings bimonthly.

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SERC Program Series 1988-2007 Major Results and Activities at a Glance

SERC Series I: Providing Reading Material and Information Resources		
Adopt a Rural School Library (ARSL)	<i>(since 1989)</i>	4,695 ARSLs
Adopt a Rural Public Library (ARPL)	<i>(since 1988)</i>	45 ARPLs
Adopt a Rural Library and Information Center (RLIC)	<i>(since 2007)</i>	4 RLICs
SERC Series II: Improving Teaching and Learning		
◆ Basic Education Conferences/Demo workshops for rural Teachers - Jointly held with provincial/municipal institutions	<i>(since 1993)</i>	41 conferences
◆ Essay contests and publications		
<i>Read to Discover</i> : publication of award essays	<i>(since 1996)</i>	12 th year, 6,000 vol./year
<i>Teach to Inspire</i> : publication of award essays & basic education conference papers	<i>(since 1999)</i>	9 th year, 8,000 vol./year
◆ <i>Read Classics</i> projects	<i>(since 2000)</i>	73 schools in 8 provinces
◆ Teaching Equipment and Facilities		
<input type="checkbox"/> Science laboratory equipment	<i>(since 2002)</i>	26 schools
<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers training VCDs	<i>(since 2002)</i>	28 schools
<input type="checkbox"/> Audiovisual equipment	<i>(since 2002)</i>	12 schools
<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom desks, chairs and tables	<i>(since 2002)</i>	59 schools
<input type="checkbox"/> Students beds for boarding facility	<i>(since 2002)</i>	1 school
<input type="checkbox"/> Musical instruments in poor counties	<i>(since 2003)</i>	261 schools
<input type="checkbox"/> Equipment/facilities for schools in specially poor counties	<i>(since 2003)</i>	5 counties in 3 provinces
<input type="checkbox"/> Equipment/material for rural teachers training centers	<i>(since 2004)</i>	10 counties in 8 provinces
<input type="checkbox"/> Equipment/material for physical education	<i>(since 2005)</i>	29 schools
<input type="checkbox"/> Computers	<i>(since 2007)</i>	16 schools & 2 county research offices
SERC Series III: Financial Aid for Rural Students		
Total number of scholarship awards	<i>(since 1997)</i>	14,938
Of which: Primary students (PS)		2,237
Junior secondary (JSS) and special education students		8,926
Senior secondary students (SSS)		3,654
College students (HE)		121
Special Projects		
◆ Tree planting project in Nei Monggol & Gansu	<i>(since 2003)</i>	>30,000 saplings
◆ Soya bean workshop & pig farm in Fuping County, Hebei	<i>(2003)</i>	1 school
◆ Arts/skills training for girls in specially poor counties, Gansu	<i>(2003)</i>	2 schools
◆ School-wide broadcasting system in Guyuan County, Ningxia	<i>(since 2005)</i>	3 schools

Sichuan Brief: Rural Schools hit in Earthquake Disaster

The 8.0 Richter scale earthquake in Sichuan on May 12, 2008, has taken many lives and caused severe damage over a large area. The SERC programs have, over the years, set up 262 rural school libraries (ARSLs), awarded 796 scholarships to rural students, and recently established a Rural Library and Information Center (RLIC) in Sichuan province. After the quake, Ms. Feng, ESS Representative in Sichuan, kept trying to contact all the schools in the disaster areas. Following was her report in early June, just before the annual report went to press.

- Wenchuan, the epicenter: local structures and transportation routes had basically collapsed; none of the 5 schools with ARSLs could be reached; condition of students and teachers unclear.
- Maoxian: teachers and students in Maoxian Secondary School and Huilong Town Primary School were safe, but not the school buildings; graduating students were attending classes held in tents to prepare for their admission exams.
- Dujiangyan: communication lines and water supply were not yet fully restored; could not reach the 2 schools in the SERC programs.
- Yanjiang District: not a major disaster area, but the walls of the school building that housed the RLIC in Nanjin Town had cracked; fortunately the RLIC equipments were not damaged and had been moved to a safe place. However, getting the RLIC set up again would be a problem as the top priority for the school is to find classrooms for the students. Could we consider providing appropriate assistance to help reconstruct the RLIC building facilities?
- Qingchuan: Some ARSLs set up before 1998 may be located in this hard hit area, but they could not be reached.
- Southeast Sichuan: damage relatively slight; no reports on casualties of students or teachers, but some school buildings may no longer be safe.
- At present the most urgent tasks are to forestall secondary disasters, to treat and cure the sick and wounded, to prevent epidemic outbreak, and to rehabilitate the people. The prime concern of schools is to resume classes and help students prepare for the college admission exams. Access to the disaster areas is restricted to relevant personnel. Hence, our understanding of the situation is limited for the time being.

ESS will follow up on the situation, keep our sponsors informed, and post updates on our website.

Twenty Years of Commitment and Persistence

- **Dr. Lungching Chiao, Executive Director of ESS/SERC**

“What can we do for them?” That was the question we kept asking ourselves after several visits to China in the 1980s. With little human or financial resources, we could not solve any big problems, but perhaps we could help in some small ways. We considered education to be the basis of development, and in the field of education we observed that the schools in the mountainous and rural areas were the most deprived and faced the most critical problems. We believed reading and writing to be the basic skills in learning, and hence helping the rural schools to set up libraries should be our priority. That was the beginning of the *Support Education in Rural China (SERC) Program Series*.

With a little over US\$2,000 in 1989, the Education and Science Society (ESS) started the *Adopt a Rural School Library (ARSL)* project, and bought more than 1,000 books for four primary schools in Hunan and Yunnan Provinces. Over the past twenty years, with contribution from many people who share the same concerns, the number of ARSLs has increased to 4,697, providing reading material for several million students, teachers, and rural residents. Furthermore, to encourage students and teachers to read and write, ESS initiated the *Read to Discover* and *Teach to Inspire* essay contests in 1995 and the *Read Classics* project in 2000. These projects have helped to broaden the thinking of students and teachers in the rural schools, fostering humanistic values and enriching writing skills.

Seeing that many children, especially girls, were deprived of the opportunity to go to school because their families could not afford the cost, ESS launched the *Financial Aid for Rural Students* program in 1997. Starting with 33 scholarship awards in that year, the program has made 14,938 awards over the past decade. Every year several hundred students report to their sponsors that they have been admitted to senior secondary school or college. The lives of many children have started to change.

Being concerned that rural teachers and school principals must upgrade their skills in order to bring forward China's education reform, ESS initiated in 1993 a series of basic education conferences and workshops. Working with two or three educational institutions in China every summer, ESS invites education specialists and researchers from outside China to make presentations at the conferences and workshops. The objective is to provide short-term intensive training for the rural teachers and principals, broadening their knowledge and understanding of the current trends in education development, encouraging new ideas in education concepts and teaching methods, strengthening moral values and commitment to education, and exploring together the basic education models best suited to China's conditions. In the past 15 years, over 30,000 teachers and school principals from the rural areas have benefited from these activities. Many of the participants have commented on how much they have found the training inspiring and effective in helping them solve the problems they have come across in education.

Over the past two decades, ESS has made adjustments every now and then in the policies and implementation details of the respective SERC programs, in order to keep up with the progress in China's development. This has ensured that the programs continue to be effective in meeting the changing needs of education in China's rural areas.

ESS serves as a conglomerate of little bridges, linking the sponsors with education development in rural China. Each of these little bridges might have helped only in some small ways, but their contribution has all added up to help promote universal quality education in China. In the course of our work, we have come to know so many people who have inspired us with their ideals and noble character. They are our cherished partners. However long our road is together, we are committed to continue our journey onwards.

- **Dr. Mu-ming Poo, President of ESS**

(Director, Institute of Neuroscience, Chinese Academy of Sciences; Paul Licht Distinguished Professor in Biology, University of California, Berkeley)

The year 2008 marks the 20th anniversary of SERC programs. How things have changed over the past two decades in China and in our lives! Of the many ventures that ESS has undertaken, SERC has not only survived, but grown into such a beauty. This is largely due to the persistence and dedication of Dr. Lungching Chiao and a large group of SERC staff and volunteers in the US, who have devoted their time and service without pay to raise funds, plan, coordinate, and supervise the SERC activities. Their efforts would not have succeeded without an equally dedicated group of volunteers spread across all provinces in China – people who work in the field of education in the rural areas, who share the same vision of SERC and who are responsible for implementing the

various programs. The development of SERC over the past two decades exemplifies a grassroots organization at its best – its growth depends on the sustained enthusiasm and dedication of the people involved, its expanding programs reflect directly the multi-dimensional needs of education in China's rural areas, and its success is measured not by the amount of dollars spent, but by the number of China's rural children whose lives have been enriched and empowered.

When ESS was founded almost three decades ago by a group of Chinese scholars in the U.S., the goal was to help the development of science and education in China. This goal continues to be appropriate today. The rapid growth of the Chinese economy in the past two decades has not been matched by the progress in the field of science and education. Scientific and educational institutions in China are badly in need of modernization and reform. The government's investment in education and basic science research, relative to the GNP, remains far below the standard of many advanced countries.

Compared to the tremendous waste in many sectors of our society, the assistance the SERC programs offer to the poor rural children seems meager and insignificant. Yet, this meager support has made a tremendous difference in the lives of so many. Reading the letters from the children, one cannot but feel that what has really made the difference is not just the material support they have received through SERC, but the caring spirit of other people in distant lands. Thus, SERC will continue to thrive and be sustained by the spirit of personal involvement, and by the realization that our personal effort will make a difference to someone else on this earth. At the beginning of this 20th anniversary year, on behalf of all members and friends of ESS, I hereby congratulate Dr. Chiao and other SERC volunteers in the US and China for their monumental achievement so far, and hope that the coming decade will bring continuing success to SERC and to other ESS programs inspired by SERC.

- Dr. Hua-Tung Nieh, Member, ESS Board of Directors

(Director, Center for Advanced Studies, Tsinghua University; Professor Emeritus, C. N. Yang Institute for Theoretical Physics, State University of New York at Stony Brook)

Chinese people have a strong attachment to their homeland. This was evident among early immigrants to America, as among later generations that left Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao or mainland China to study in the US. In the 1970s a large group of young students and intellectuals, inspired by the movement to defend Diaoyutai, became deeply concerned about their motherland. Working in different areas and through different channels, they have sought to contribute to China's development in different ways.

In 1979, as the US and China moved to resume official relations, a group of us working in the fields of education and science got together and set up ESS, to serve as a bridge for cultural and educational exchange between the US and China. With the support of C. N. Yang and a number of other scholars, we started the journal, *Science and Technology*, the first issue of which was published in Chinese in January 1980. The journal presented a series of articles on science and technology, education, economics and management, introducing the experience of other countries to Chinese scholars at a time when China was just starting to open up to the western world. In the years that followed, ESS helped various institutions in China to organize conferences and workshops on topics relevant to China's modernization programs.

The main concern of ESS members has been the development of science and education in China, especially education as the foundation of development. Dr. Lungching Chiao, linking up with other people sharing the same vision, started to work on projects to support education in rural China, first in New York and later in the Washington, D.C. area. With funds raised in the US, Taiwan and Hong Kong, they put all their efforts into the SERC programs, helping to raise the quality of education in rural China through the provision of library books, financial aid and training activities. Over the past 20 years, the SERC programs have won tremendous support from people both within and outside China. As reported on the NBC Nightly News in October 2007, the programs have made a difference in the schools, their students and teachers in many remote and rural villages in China. The SERC programs have indeed made a difference, not only in terms of the material support they have provided, but also because they have embodied the love and care of overseas Chinese for the disadvantaged groups in their motherland, warming the hearts of the people and bringing them hope.

Twenty years make up a large part of a person's life. Dr. Chiao, her husband, and many ESS volunteers within and outside China, have dedicated a large part of their lives to the work of the SERC programs. I would like to salute them from the bottom of my heart!



SERC Program Series I - Providing Reading Material and Information Resources

Adopt a Rural School Library (ARSL). Altogether 297 ARSL were set up in 15 provinces and regions in China in 2007. Seven of these were sponsored by the State of Maryland. The total number of ARSLs since 1989 has increased to 4,697. Details are shown in Chart 1 and Tables 1 and 2 (pages B-1, B-2).

The ARSLs have provided much needed reading material to rural schools and communities in China's remote areas. Not only students and teachers but also local residents have benefited from the books made available, finding in them useful knowledge that helps them improve their farming techniques and increase their income. The ARSLs have made a difference in their lives.

With the advance in information and communication technology, the Internet has become accessible even in remote areas, and in the world today knowing how to use computers is as essential a skill as knowing how to read and write. An increasingly large body of knowledge now exists beyond the realm of print and paper. Openly available digitized data bases, including data on education, science and technology, are expanding at an exponential rate. In order to help rural schools and communities benefit from this process, ESS has launched a new project in 2007 - *Adopt a Rural Library and Information Center (RLIC)* - as an essential part of our continuing efforts to help improve the quality of education in rural China.

Rural Library and Information Center (RLIC)

As there were yet no specific allocation for the new RLIC project, the initial costs have been financed by savings from ESS administrative expenses and some of the funds for the ARSL projects, including donations from Mr. Siu Kuen Au. In the few months after the new project was launched, ESS volunteers and representatives worked closely with local educational agencies and schools to draft the project documents, select the project sites, purchase the necessary hardware and software, set up and test the computer systems, and train the operation staff. By spring 2008, four RLICs have begun operation in rural Gansu (Zhenyuan County), Nei Monggol (Linxi County), Ningxia (Yuanzhou District) and Sichuan (Yanjiang District). [Unfortunately the RLIC in Sichuan was affected by the recent earthquake and has to look for a new site (see page E-3).]

These RLICs are set up in rural secondary schools that meet the following requirement: (a) the school must be centrally located and fed by at least 10 elementary schools, have an enrollment from 1,000 to 3,000, and maintain a good teacher/student ratio; (b) the school must have broadband accessibility, qualified key personnel, an adequate library collection and appropriate premises to house the computers; and (c) the school principal must agree to open the RLIC to the public after school hours and on Saturdays, make books available to the feeder elementary schools and the surrounding rural community, organize computer training classes, and provide consultation to local farming technology stations.

Each RLIC is equipped with 30 user terminals, a micro computer for teachers and librarians, and a central server controlling a local area network linked to the internet as well as national and regional education and agricultural networks.

The RLIC will serve as a micro-computerized classroom and a multimedia library for the rural schools and communities. It will help them tap the rich information resources available online, and connect with the ongoing modernization process in the rest of the country. Students, teachers and school administrators will be able to use online resources for their research and studies. The local farming population will benefit from the availability of agricultural network data on such topics as climatic changes, animal or plant diseases, pricing of produce, and management techniques. The RLIC will also make it possible to replicate the ESS summer training programs so that rural teachers and principals who cannot attend the conferences and workshops in person will be able to share in the experience.

In the future ESS hopes to transform more traditional ARSLs into RLICs, with support from specific donations for the project. Contributions are welcome for an entire RLIC (US\$20,000) or a portion thereof.



Children learn to use computers for the first time at an RLIC



SERC Program Series II Improving Teaching and Learning

The SERC Program Series II comprises a group of activities aimed at upgrading the quality and skills of teachers, motivating students to learn, and improving the overall learning and teaching environment in rural schools. These activities include: (a) basic education conferences and workshops for rural teachers and school principals; (b) essay contests for students and teachers to encourage reading and writing; and (c) provision of teaching equipment and facilities to schools in the remote rural areas.

Basic Education Conferences/Workshops. Each summer ESS works with educational institutions in China to organize conferences and workshops for teachers and school principals from the rural areas. The objective is to provide short-term intensive training to participants to enhance their understanding of education concepts, improve their teaching methods and promote the sharing of experiences. Since 1993, forty-one such conferences/workshops have been held (details in Table 5, page B-5).

The 2007 conferences/workshops were held in Lanzhou (Gansu), Qufu (Shandong) and Hefei (Anhui), co-sponsored respectively by the Northwest Normal University, the Jining Education Bureau, and the Anhui Provincial Education Bureau. Other institutions also contributed to these events, including several Chinese language training centers in US universities, and the State of Maryland/Anhui Province Sister Relationship Commission. Participants included about 1,400 teachers and school principals coming from all over China. Two hundred participants who came from poor remote rural areas in 16 provinces were sponsored by the ESS. Mr. K. P. Tin, a well known philanthropist from Hong Kong whose foundation has supported the SERC programs for many years, honored us with his presence at the opening ceremony at Qufu.

Professional educators from outside China were invited to the conferences/workshops to share their knowledge and experience in pedagogy, education reform and current trends in educational development. Professor Rita Smith of Stonehill College, MA, who was named Teacher of the Year by Time Magazine in 1985, made lively presentations on effective pedagogy and cooperative teaching methods. A diverse range of topics were covered by other specialists - the principles of language instruction and the task-oriented approach, application of learning theory and strategy, comparison of math teaching in the US and China, the relationship between learning Chinese ancient culture and reading and writing skills, practical lessons on how to be a good teacher, science education and the “learning by doing” inquiry-based approach, etc. Demonstrative lessons on teaching math in high school and teaching English in elementary school were offered by two teachers from Maryland, Shanti Stone and Sarah Danieal.

Twelve American students studying Chinese in US universities shared their experience in learning Chinese language and culture, and talked about their own development through elementary and high schools in the US, how various activities in US schools help encourage and motivate learning, cultivate learning abilities and creativity, and foster social consciousness. They also discussed issues concerning standard testing in US elementary and high schools, the influence of teachers on student motivation and confidence, rural schools in remote areas, and early child development in poor communities.

The conference/workshop agenda was richly packed with many activities catered to special groups. It included a forum that brought together school principals to discuss various issues regarding school administration, strategies and initiatives, roles and responsibilities, curriculum reform, etc. A school principal from Huining County in Gansu commented in the evaluation form: *“I have been a school principal for 13 years and have*



Group photo of rural teachers, school principals, ESS volunteers and local representatives, visiting education specialists and American students, at the 2007 basic education conference in Qufu Normal University, Shandong Province

previously attended almost 20 training courses organized by various provincial and county agencies. This is the only training activity that has touched my soul and made me truly understand the meaning of such words as morals, feelings, care, work and charisma." His comments were echoed by many others at the conferences. Participants not only gained professional knowledge during the few days they were there, but also felt strengthened in their commitment to work in education. They hoped that the conferences/workshops could be extended and that the major activities would be recorded on disk or tape to benefit other teachers and principals unable to attend.

Essay Contests. The 12th *Read to Discover* essay contest for students and the 9th *Teach to Inspire* essay contest for teachers were held in 2007. These efforts to encourage reading and writing met with enthusiastic response and essay submissions were overwhelming. One of the winning essays in the *Read to Discover* contest is included in this report (page E-12). Other essays that received distinguished awards in either contest will be posted on the ESS website. The K. P. Tin Foundation in Hong Kong and the Raybin Q. Wong Foundation in the U.S. continue to finance awards given in these essay contests.



Provision of Teaching Equipment and Facilities. To help improve the teaching and learning environment in rural schools, ESS provides equipment and facilities according to the needs of the schools that meet ESS criteria for assistance. In 2007, ESS helped 11 schools with much needed classroom furniture, 63 schools with musical instruments, and 21 schools with sports equipment. In addition, computer equipment was provided to the four RLICs recently set up, as well as to some schools in specially poor counties in Nei Monggol.

2007 ESS Summer Site Visits in China – Some Interesting Observations

- Bella Li, ESS volunteer

[As in previous summers since 1993, ESS volunteers went on a trip to China in July 2007 to (a) conduct basic education conferences and workshops for rural teachers and education workers; (b) meet with ESS local representatives to discuss issues related to the SERC programs; and (c) visit some of the SERC beneficiaries and project sites. Bella Li reports on some interesting observations made at a post-trip review meeting at Dr. Chiao's residence last September.]

Ms. Shao of the Raybin Wong Foundation, a former table tennis national champion, conducted unannounced site visits to two schools in Nei Monggol. She came away more than deeply moved. Her opening sentence at the ESS meeting was: "ESS should know the change it has brought about (in Nei Monggol) since 1995."

In the first school, Ms. Shao sat in a class where any student could recite any section of the Confucius Dialect when called upon. In another class, the teacher was discussing "The Three Kingdoms" and "The Monkey King". He randomly picked a character from one of the books and asked who would like to offer his opinion. Hands were eagerly raised and the students fought to have the chance to have his/her say. In their school vegetable garden, among the thriving plants, a board was erected to post the best essays written by the students.

At the second school Ms. Shao visited, she realized that ESS had given the school not only books and financial assistance, but also self esteem. The walkways in the school yard were paved with surplus gravel collected from construction sites and transported to the school by the teachers and students. The track and field area was also built by the students. The dining room was clean. Eating utensils were kept in cupboards with numbers corresponding to their seats at the tables. There were no flies because everyone was expected to kill them on sight. The school cultivated vegetables and stored them in the cellar for winter time, and raised pigs for a year round supply of meat. When Ms. Shao commended the principal on the school's self reliant spirit, he responded, "I am here to teach MY CHILDREN to become the best." He did not say "my students".

Another volunteer, Zuo Yixin, conducted site visits to one elementary school and two middle schools near Chengdu, Sichuan, all of which were still in session. When she evaluated the rate of use of the library books, she noted that the books on history and historical figures seemed brand new and were lined up neatly on the shelf as if no one had ever borrowed them, whereas the books on teaching methodology looked well used. Her visits yielded valuable insight into the choice of library books provided under the ARSL projects, as well as the future area of focus for the music programs for which she is responsible.

SERC Program Series III

Financial Aid for Rural Students



In 2007, the *Financial Aid for Rural Students (FARS)* program provided support to 1,662 students in China's rural areas. Of these, 83 were in primary, 396 in junior secondary, 998 in senior secondary, 61 in higher education institutions and 124 in special schools for children with disabilities. Since 1997, the program has awarded a total of 14,938 scholarships to rural students in China. Details are shown in Chart 2 and Tables 3 and 4 (pages B-3 and B-4).

Although the government has expanded its budget for education in recent years, much remains to be done to improve the quality of education in rural China. Over the past three years, the main focus of the FARS program has shifted to students in senior secondary and higher levels of education, and to students with disabilities. These groups have to rely largely on private financing for their education, but many poor rural families cannot afford the high cost. Assistance from the FARS program have helped the children from these families to continue their education. In the future, FARS will gradually increase support to the disadvantaged groups, including children from poor families in the remote rural areas, children with disabilities, and children whose parents have left them in the care of relatives or friends in their home village or town in order to earn income from paid jobs elsewhere.

Because of the depreciation of the US dollar against the RMB yuan, we have to adjust the levels of contribution to the FARS program. These are currently set as follows: US\$100 per junior secondary student, US\$200 per senior secondary student, and US\$400 per college student. Assistance to students with disabilities is set at US\$100 per student in primary and junior secondary, and at US\$200 per student in secondary vocational schools.

Scholarships awarded to students with disabilities have increased over the last few years. Recently the Special Education School in Luzhou (Sichuan) wrote to us about the difference our assistance has made to the lives of the children. "ESS supported 20 students in our school in 2006 and 30 in 2007, about 30 percent of the total number of students in the school. The scholarships have encouraged the families involved to send their children to school, and at the same time helped set the children's mind at ease as they feel less of a burden on their families. More important, the children are touched by the care and concern from people overseas who have never met them. They have gradually come to understand that the world is beautiful, that they should make the best of their lives, study hard and try to help others who need help. ESS has helped the children develop a healthy attitude to life, warming their hearts and teaching them to care for other people."

During our summer visit to China in July 2007, we had the opportunity to get together with 12 scholarship recipients attending college in Lanzhou (Gansu). Having just finished their final exams, they delayed their trip back home in order to meet with us. Some of these students have been supported by the FARS program since junior secondary. We had a good time chatting and laughing, and have remained in contact afterwards, communicating every now and then through emails.



Scholarship Recipients Inspired to do More

With assistance from the FARS program, many rural students in China have been able to continue their studies even though their families could not afford to pay for their tuition and other fees at school. Thankful for the opportunities given to them, these students have studied hard and completed their education through primary, secondary and even college. They feel they are the lucky ones. They would like to pass on the love and care they have received from their sponsors, to make the world a better place for all. Their heart-felt gratitude flows through their letters, as told by Bella Li in her translations of the letters below.

Letter from Li Shuxian, from Jingtai County in Gansu. Under the sponsorship of the SERC scholarship program for nine years, Li Shuxian, who comes from a farming family, has successfully completed junior



secondary and vocational school majoring in Health Care. Now she serves as a midwife in a hospital, happily and busily welcoming new lives into the world every day. In a letter to her sponsors Tang Chongshi and Yang Wenjing, she wrote passionately:

"While the loving care of parents is indispensable to the growth of a child, my development is inseparable from your caring support. My transformation from an ignorant girl to a useful midwife, a process both long yet short at the same time, has been nourished with your support, encouragement, and caring. In my mind, you are my parents overseas! Your kindness has also inspired me to make a lifelong commitment to help others. Because you have given me the best kind of wealth, this is the only way that I can repay you. Nine years ago when you sent me to school, I was a very common girl whose only outstanding attribute was having endured more hardship than her peers. Since then, you

have been deeply concerned about my studies, my life and my development. Compared to my peers, I am more fortunate because of your loving care. You have given me so much for so long without even having met me. I have inherited your spirit of giving, and will extend the loving care to others, to repay Papa Tang and Mama Yang."

Letter from Yang Yan, from Enshi City, Hubei. Yang Yan, a 12th grade student in the First Secondary School, wrote to her sponsor, Yin Yizhang: *"Several years ago, I was a girl with an inferiority complex. I felt that there was no love and no warmth in the world because we were stricken with poverty. Today, I have grown up to be an optimistic and cheerful girl. The personality change has taken place gradually with your support. I have developed confidence and courage and no longer feel inferior to others, as I have learned that there is love in the world. The support you have extended to me is not only material but also spiritual. Your support has helped me during my junior and senior secondary school years, the important stages of my education. In a few months, I will be graduating from senior secondary school. Regardless of which route I am going to take, I will live to be a good person and will not let you down. Though we are separated by the Pacific Ocean, we live under the same blue sky. I hope my gratitude and best wishes will turn into a soft breeze. When you feel the breeze brush against your face, please think of them as the myriad thanks I am sending you."*

The Story of Zhang Ning

[Song Zhida, an ESS sponsor and a volunteer, wrote the Chinese original of this article]

In the 1960s, I lived in Borong Village in Molidawa Banner in Hulunbeier, Nei Monggol, as a youngster from the city sent to work in the countryside. In those days the peasant girls started to toil on the land for subsistence when they were six or seven years old, and few could go to school. Forty years have now passed by. Today most children are in school, but not everyone enjoys the same opportunity.

Zhang Ning, a 16 year old girl in Borong, has two sisters. Her mother cannot do hard work after a major surgery. Her father cannot move around easily, having fractured his lower leg in a car accident. Natural disasters have compounded their misery, so that for many years the annual family income has remained at around 2,000 yuan RMB (US\$350). Her elder sister had to quit school to work in order to make ends meet for the family.

Four years ago, ESS started to help Zhang Ning when she began her studies in junior secondary. She was very clever and very diligent, and earned high academic scores. In her second year in junior secondary, she was selected to participate in the Math Olympics in Nei Monggol, and she won a second class distinction award. I was proud of her.

Last summer, Zhang Ning was admitted to the best senior secondary school in Molidawa. Just before school started, the money saved for her tuition had to be diverted to buy a pump and diesel for irrigation. When Zhang Ning left home for the first time to go stay at the school dormitory, she still had no idea where her parents would find money for her tuition. With ESS support, her tuition was paid. Zhang Ning did not have to follow her elder sister's steps.

Zhang Ning said in her letter, *"I always feel my heart surge, I always hear a voice telling me: don't give up, never ever. Don't forget your parents' aspirations; don't forget your auntie's help. . . . Senior secondary is bringing me closer to the realization of my dreams. I hope one day in the future, I will give my love, together with the love you have given me, to other children who needs love and care. . . . I will work hard for my dreams."* Zhang Ning kept her promise. In her first semester in senior secondary, she was placed within the top 5 percent of the 2,000 or so students in her class.

I would like to tell Zhang Ning, and other students like her, that many good people in the world are willing to help rural children who are diligent and eager to learn. Study well, and do not give up hope. You will reach your dreams, and your future will be bright. I hope all of you will be admitted to college and become useful members of your communities, helping to build a better life for your homeland.

The SERC Programs have made a Difference in Ningxia

[reported by An Bo, ESS Representative in Yuanzhou, Ningxia]

The SERC programs have been implemented in the Yuanzhou District in Ningxia for over ten years. More than 100 rural primary and secondary schools have benefited from these programs. Education development in these poor rural areas has been enlivened, thanks to the sustained support and concern of generous contributors, including the Raybin Q. Wong Foundation, the K. P. Tin Foundation and other ESS sponsors.

Adopt a Rural School Library. This project has benefited the largest number of schools in our district. The project design is rooted in the basics of education, encouraging reading and writing through the provision of books, and gradually improving these skills. Since the project started in Dabao Primary School, a village school, students and teachers have developed an overall interest in reading and writing. Now students in the higher grades read over 15 books a year. Both teachers and students have won awards in the annual ESS essay contests, *Read to Discover* and *Teach to Inspire*. In another school, the Touying Primary School, the award certificates and winning essays each year are posted in an exhibition to encourage participation in these events. Two more awards have been added to the collection in 2007 by students who won distinguished awards in the 12th *Read to Discover* essay contest. [one of these essays is printed on the next page.] These results in the project schools have inspired the Yuanzhou Education Bureau to develop an action plan called “Fragrance of Books in Schools” to promote reading and writing in schools throughout the district. The action plan calls for the organization of reading activities around various themes, and specifies that students should read at least 12 books and teachers at least 6 books each year.

Adopt a Most Impoverished County. Over the past six years, the Raybin Q. Wong Foundation has provided timely assistance to many primary, secondary and college students from poor rural families, helping them to complete their studies. It has also provided much needed equipment and furniture for many underserved schools. Students now have desks and chairs in their classrooms, teachers have desks for their work, and teaching and learning are enlivened with appropriate laboratory facilities and sports equipment.



A world of difference – students at the Dageda Primary School crowding around a table in the classroom a few years ago (left) and students seated at desks and chairs financed by the Raybin Q. Wong Foundation in 2005 (right).

Adopt Musical Instruments. The provision of musical instruments has enlivened the teaching and learning environment in the schools, and fostered the development of artistic talents among the students. For example, students in a village school in a Hui minority community, the Yinhe Primary School in Qinghe Township, now enjoy very much their music lessons and are eager to participate in the school choir and other cultural activities organized by the school. They have won awards in cultural performances in the County in the past two years.

Public Announcement System in Pengbao Secondary School. The public announcement system has created a rich cultural environment in the school, and provided an additional channel for students to learn. Through programs broadcast by the system, students can appreciate classical poems, listen to music, as well as learn putonghua and English. In 2007 students have improved their listening and speaking skills in English, by about 12 percents and 2 percent, respectively.

Yuanzhou Education Training Center. The provision of multimedia equipment in the training center, financed by Mr. Siu Kuen Au, has helped improved the quality of the training for teachers and school principals. The training has upgraded the teaching and administration skills of the participants and improved the quality of education in the rural schools. Effectiveness of the training programs is evident in the enhanced performance of many school principals and core teachers in the district.



Instructor in Yuanzhou Education Training Center using multimedia equipment donated by Mr. Siu Kuen Au

Two Bottles of Tap Water

by Ma Wenyue

(sixth grade student, Touying Primary School, Yuanzhou District, Guyuan, Ningxia Hui Minority Autonomous Region)

- Translated by ESS Volunteer May-lee Chai

Selected from the 2007 (12th) Read to Discover Essay Contest

I am a child who lives on a big mountain where we have very limited access to water. Therefore, getting drinking water is one of the biggest problems we face. In order to have enough water, every family has a big pit. In the winter, we gather snow to put inside. In the summer, whenever it rains, we first clean our yards, then we dig a channel from the middle of the yard to the pit so the water will run inside.

We use water sparingly. The water we use to wash vegetables, we use again to wash our faces. Then we use the same water to wash our clothes. Because it takes so much water to wash clothing, we can only do that once every few days. Even when the water turns black, no one throws it away. We do not easily waste a single drop of water.

One time, my grandmother got sick and had to stay at the county hospital. My father and I went to visit her. The trees along the road seemed to fly backwards as our bus drove by. In the county center, tall and big buildings were everywhere, and there were so many people and vehicles, just like how we described cities in the old days, "with endless streams of horses and carriages". Such prosperity! At the hospital, my grandmother was lying on a cot. She was overjoyed when she saw us coming in.

I felt my stomach ached, and my aunt took me to the bathroom. Afterwards she used water to flush the toilet. Oh! What a pity that people in the city used such clean water just to flush a toilet! In our village, the water from a single flush would be enough for our

use for several days. Such precious water shouldn't be wasted. I carefully turned on the faucet, and sparkling water came out at once. Every drop seemed to dance with life. I took a sip. So sweet! My whole body felt cool and refreshed.

When I returned to my grandmother's room, I asked my aunt to give me two empty water bottles. I filled the bottles to the brim with tap water. I wanted to bring them home so that my mother, younger brother, and younger sister could taste the tap water too.

On the bus home, I held on tight to the two bottles of water. After we got off at our stop, we still had to walk some seven miles to our village. On the road, the hot sun beat down upon the ground, and I grew thirsty. Papa asked me for one of the bottles of water, but I wouldn't part with it. We endured our thirst as the sun bore down upon us all the way home.

Once we got home, I brought out the bottles. My brother and sister ran towards me. I held the bottles up high and said, "Look! This is tap water that people in the city use!" They each took a sip and proclaimed in unison, "So sweet!" Mama took a bottle with great care, afraid to spill a single drop. Putting the bottle carefully against her lips, she took a small sip, and said again and again, "How sweet! City people's water is just not the same as our water here."

I vowed in my heart, "When I grow up, we're going to have tap water too, and Mama can drink all she wants."



Dageda Primary School in Touying Township, viewed across its back wall. Water is precious in this arid land.