

Project Shine 2013



陽光計劃

Love in Any Language, Straight From the Heart

Charles Chee

“Charles Chee is a Counselor and Sunday school leader for the young people at Richmond Hill Chinese Baptist Church and an active member of the CRRS team”

Project Shine is an English Summer Camp organized by CRRS where young people from Canada and the USA can participate as English instructors to teach and share with the young people in Guangxi China. This year we are blessed with the opportunity to spend two weeks at Rongshui County National High School. The city of Rongshui is approximately 4 hours bus ride west of the picturesque city of Guilin, best known for its beautiful limestone mountains and flowing rivers.

Journal Entry:

July 26, 2013 - A Physical and Emotional Journey

Today is our last day in China. We arrived at Guilin Liang-Jiang International Airport after a long and bumpy ride from Rongshui. The bus somehow managed to bottom out its suspension while weaving through the endless twists and turns through the mountains. The irony is that most people in Canada would pay a premium for such a ride in an amusement park. With only a few incidents of nausea, we arrived safely after 4.5 hours. Most of us were exhausted and feeling a little nostalgic; looking forward on the one hand, the comfort of home and family, while on the other, a longing for the new friends we left behinds just hours earlier.

Earlier this morning, our bus was scheduled to leave Rongshui at 7:00 am for Guilin. Our luggage was packed and we managed a quick breakfast. It was to be an emotional day that actually

started the night before. Many students arrived at our hotel lobby well before 6:00 am for a last opportunity to say good bye and to offer a final heart-felt hug. Expressions like “last opportunity” and “final” suddenly take on greater meaning. They have become so hauntingly real. Fast forward a year from now, the students, for the lucky few, would have been accepted into university; for others off to work and still for a few may even have been married off by their families. This is the reality of life for the senior high school students in the rural China. For the rest of us, we return to a familiar world full of choices and the freedom to choose.

Journal Entry:

July 28, 2013 - Youth and Youthfulness

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to sign up for Project Shine. Not long after, my son Justin asked if he could come along. I was touched and overwhelmed. My answer of course was a resounding YES! Having my son with me on this trip was truly amazing and a blessing. My daughter Lauren unfortunately could not join us as she had already committed to working with inner city kids in Toronto. I am very proud of her for taking the initiative to be involved in volunteer work. What can I say, I have been blessed with two wonderful kids! For the parents out there, consider trading up your family vacation for volunteer work - you will be amazed!

The Project Shine team of 25 strong was led by our fabulous leader Esther Leung from CRRS Vancouver. The team was made up of high school and university students and dedicated people from Calgary, San Francisco, Toronto and Vancouver. Our age ranged from 15 to 55. Of course I am the youngest; at heart I



mean. I had visited Guangxi with CRRS on two other occasions but this was the first with Project Shine. Justin and a few others were also new to this project. Approximately 200 local high school students participated in Project Shine. Our mission was to share our Love with the under privileged students through the learning of English. It was a wonderful opportunity for the PS team members to participate in a teaching capacity. The first couple of days were a struggle, having to adjust to the hot and humid weather and a new environment; we also managed to overcome the language barrier. The local students too had to get used to our habits, individual idiosyncrasies and our strange language and expressions. As always, youthful enthusiasm and creativity trumped over all obstacles and barriers, and soon these struggles were behind us.

Journal Entry:

August 3, 2013 – Reflection: The Reality of Life, Hope and Charity

Over a two-week period (July 15-26), I had come to know the students, their backgrounds and their stories. Their perseverance and hard work, their patience and desire to learn were all worthy of our respect. Their openness and acceptance of us into their lives gave us an opportunity to appreciate and recognise the challenges they face each day. Though we were there to offer our assistance in the study of the English language, I realized that we were given a chance to learn and reflect upon who we are and the reality of life. Needless to say, the team connected well with the students and many wonderful friendships were cultivated. The language barrier was never a real challenge. Genuine care for someone is the result of love that comes from the heart, a direct connection from one heart to another heart. Throughout the centuries, many writers, poets and scholars have tried to

express the meaning of love. However, the full measure of love can only be experienced when you are a part of that connection. That genuine love felt between teachers and students was well expressed in the morning of July 26th.

The flight back to Toronto gave me much time to reflect upon our trip and why we were there. I have always felt that charity is within all of us, but for some reasons, not often familiar to us. Charity is not just about the giving of money – that, I think, is the easy part; albeit an important part. Perhaps we have conveniently partition it in our mind and parcelled it away deep inside us, or our lives are just simply too busy. But it exists, a gift from our Creator and it is powerful stuff. The two weeks we spent in Rongshui may have been short but, I believe, very precious. What we do have impact - although the impact may not be obvious nor can it be seen immediately. The fact that we were in Rongshui sends a powerful message to the students – ‘We care about you and we love you’. For many students, this is the first time they have experienced it. In rural China where people have been marginalised, families broken up due to economic pressure, it is a warm and reassuring message of hope and of life. The fact that “someone cares” is enough to give them courage to move forward.

As I sit comfortably on my couch, gathering my thoughts for this article, I cannot help but think of the students in Rongshui. They have a tough road ahead of them. There will be many challenges. Who will guide them? What will become of them? I struggled with these questions. One thing I do know, within the eyes of each of the students, I see determination and hope. My parting words to the students were simple. I told them that I love them and I will remember them. I missed them very much.

Reflection from Justin Chee

Justin Chee, a sixteen year old Grade 11 student living in Toronto. He enjoys playing the violin in the school orchestra. Justin helps out with the worship team at his church in playing the guitar.

When I first signed up for project shine, I didn't really know what to expect. At first I was pretty nervous with all the new team members I had to work with and all the new students I had to teach, but it was all for nothing. All the students were really friendly and before I knew it I was having a great time in and outside of school with all of them. It also felt great to see that they really appreciated us and that we were actually impacting their lives. They showed us that we don't need all our gadgets and luxuries to have a good time. I also know that before this trip I was pretty introverted and while I still am, going on this trip definitely helped me be more open to new things and people. Overall Project shine was a great experience and I had a really great time.

