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## Breaking the Silence: Fostering the Artistic Potential of Ulaanbaatar's At-Risk Orphans

### **Introduction to the Issue**

The future of a society lies in the hands of its youth. Mongolia is facing a unique challenge in having an extraordinarily large youth population combined with a very high number of orphans and an inadequate system to properly attend to their basic needs. The challenges that these youths are facing are connected to insufficient access to education, food, shelter and material resources. More importantly, for the large orphan population, a lack of supervision, role-models and sources of creative activities, results in a lack of hope and direction. This project, which involves a partnership between two musicians, one of whom is a native of Mongolia, intends to reveal, share, and empower the voices of these youths through exposure to music. We will focus on the particularly high-risk and impressionable minds of Ulaanbaatar's large orphan population. We believe that when these children are introduced to music at an intimate level during this stage of their development, a sense of self-worth, responsibility and peace will have a real opportunity to become part of their future.

As is the case with many developing economies, Mongolia's largest industry is the exporting of natural resources. This industry lends itself primarily to experienced land-owners and their children who inherit the property. This leaves few chances for urban orphans to become involved, and therefore little incentive for the Mongolian government to invest in their future and education. Over half of Mongolia's population (59%) is under the age of 30 and 27% of that group is under the age of 14. Youth may be the host of optimism and hope, but it is also fragile and more vulnerable to the dangers of influence. In the City of Ulaanbaatar, it is not uncommon to find groups of teenagers and young-adults loitering in the streets and engaging in a variety of undesirable activities including public drunkenness, drug abuse, sexual harassment and general recklessness. A large percentage of these delinquent youths once lived in the many orphanages and underprivileged areas of Mongolia's capital city.

Mongolia is developing rapidly, and will very soon be ready to more heartily foster a greater variety of industries including the creative and performing arts. A pursuit of the arts is not merely an occupation- but the adoption of a lifestyle. Being a developing musician requires high levels of creativity, self-discipline and determination. In addition, performing for an audience or with an ensemble cultivates integrity, empathy and compassion. Outside of a fortunate few, music is not a popular commodity in Mongolia, and especially in the streets of Ulaanbaatar. This isn't to suggest that there is a lack of music in Mongolian culture, but merely that it is severely under-prioritized in urban society. It is our goal to inspire the orphans during their precarious developmental stage and to inform them enough to potentially harbor a lifelong interest in creative activity for the primary purpose of steering them towards a more peaceful future. Furthermore, we would like to re-ignite the innate and necessary artistic culture of the Mongolian people and their impressionable country, because not unlike the orphans, it is also on the cusp of fresh opportunity.

### **Plan Detail for Education**

We will visit three carefully selected orphanages inside the city that we have enabling personal connections with: The Donbosko Orphanage, The Rainbow Children's Center and Our Home No. 1. We have been verbally assured by Ganchimeg, manager of Donbosko, and Aamaa Namjil, director of Our Home No.1, that we will be welcome to conduct as many workshops as we like during the month of June at the aforementioned orphanages and that they are certain our visits will be greatly appreciated by the orphans. Each of our visits will include an interactive workshop, basic introductory music lessons and a performance. All of these will be conducted in the students' native language. The workshops will focus on show-and-tell style introductions of important components of musical performance and composition. This will enhance the comprehensibility of the subsequent performance that we will engage in and will give them an opportunity to observe what they have just learned in action. The process will take place over three visits per week at each site over the course of four weeks during the month of June for a total of twelve visits at each orphanage by the end of the project. Each visit will involve live examples of traditional Mongolian music to supply a more comfortable environment and to emphasize an attitude of stimulation rather than foreign influence. As resources for our pedagogical endeavors we will bring several recorders, hand drums and student violins with us for the children to use (see attached budget sheet). These instruments will be left at each orphanage for the children to practice and experiment with for as long as they live there. To ensure that this process is continued after the time of our project we are working to establish connections between the three orphanages and the music pedagogy department at The Music and Dance College. With the instruments and inspirational resources we will have left with the orphans, the pedagogy department that is hungry for opportunities involving hands-on exposure seems like an ideal partner in a lasting, if not permanent, symbiotic relationship. Even if we only succeed in teaching the students a simple tune and touch on a couple of basic musical concepts, an important threshold will have been crossed.

### **Plan Detail for Musical Exposure and Measurable Results**

Our second objective concerns the rekindling of enthusiasm for public music in Ulaanbaatar. We plan to approach this issue by engaging in outdoor street performances both in the city and in some surrounding rural areas with high concentrations of underprivileged children during the month of June. These performances will serve two purposes: first, they will literally bring music to the public spaces of the city that is currently bereft of any artistic expression, and secondly they will serve as a medium of promotion for our final event. Throughout the course of the project, we will be compiling photographs and video footage for a multimedia montage that will be presented during a final concert. This event will be held at The Music and Dance College, the school that Gereltuya formerly attended, will be open to the public and will aim to convey a message of organic stimulation, that music is an inherent form of human expression. The children that we will have worked with will take the stage for a brief presentation of their newly acquired skills, symbolizing a tangible starting point for musical performance in both their lives and the streets of Ulaanbaatar. For these children this will certainly be the first opportunity to perform publicly and not only to truly understand what it is that motivates an artist to perform, but also to be understood and feel the effects of their voice on the Mongolian community. This final presentation will not only have a function of its own, but will also provide a symbol of our ultimate objective: presenting music as a virtuous medium of peace and potential.