

DAVIS PROJECT FOR PEACE FINAL REPORT

Section I:

Header:

Title of Project: Connected! PeerToPeer Project (Haiqiao China)

Country Where the Project Took Place: China

Sponsoring College: Carleton College

Student and Home Country: Yawen Chen, China

Student's College: Carleton College

Project Website: www.haiqiaocn.com (release date: early October)

Exemplary messages from the we-chat public account: http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA4MzkyNTEwMg==&mid=200405277&idx=1&sn=5ff25e165bc47750d6382c6b099d514f#rd

Summary of Project Goals:

This Project for Peace aims to connect highly selective high school volunteers with blind peers for a long-term, one-on-one, peer pair experience. With the support of a Davis Project for Peace grant, this long-term program was launched this summer and will last until at least next summer with the efforts of three staff members and nearly 100 people involved.

Project Process:

My project did not start as smoothly as I proposed. While I was away from China, volunteer recruitment progressed very slowly. To let students participate in a long-term project, schools and parents in China demand certifications and extremely detailed program plans, both of which were not set up at the time. Additionally, as summer was approaching, students were busy with their final exams and the highly selective students we targeted had already made summer plans. The city of Nanjing was busy with preparations for the International Youth Olympic Games and, thus, few schools and students had energy to set up new plans and programs. I realized that for a program that is not yet established, it is crucial to be on the scene in person.

As a result, upon arriving in China I spent more than half of the summer traveling around and lobbying with people about my project. I started in-person discussions with officials in three related government-run organizations, initiated conversations with a few non-profit organizations, and cold called about ten schools around the nation. At the same time, I continually updated details of the program while getting feedback from students and organizations I talked with. I also further established the philosophy behind the model of long-term peer pairing and drafted a post on the program's public wechat account which was viewed more than 600 times in two weeks. Even though I experimented with many different ways of marketing, including online platforms such as wechat, weibo, and renren, as well as hosting offline informational session meetings, recruitment on both sides was difficult as the cities are huge and students were all back home. In the meanwhile, I drafted a dozen different flyers, texts and documents to broadcast the idea of micro-level social change through interpersonal connection.

After several weeks of effort, two people, Tony Lu and Guoqiang Zhu, joined me as year-round staff members and we started to work on the project together. Tony and I are in charge of the admission process, drafting program materials, and setting up program structures. Guoqiang, a government official, handles relationships with government, media, and responding to contacts in China.

As a team, we selected nine volunteers from Wuhan, Shenzhen, Tianjing, Hangzhou and Shanghai out of 13 individual applications. Once we secured partnerships with high schools, we then created an application process and received a total of 99 participant applications from Nanjing with a year-long commitment to our program. Since then, we have been busy interviewing everyone while implementing

another project: a website that records all stories of the pair experiences throughout the year. We aim to collect 1000 stories of youth empowering themselves and their blind peers' lives through the peer-to-peer connections over the next five years, meaning that we are committed to connect at least 1000 pairs in person in the upcoming five years.

Unfortunately, this year we had to reject more than three quarters of the applicants due to the constraints of our leadership team and budget limit. Therefore, we are extremely committed to maintaining a high quality program this year in preparation for a much larger program staff team and attracting more funding to expand the program.

Besides the on-going selection and pairing process, the team is also busy improving the pairing experience and enhancing our program structures. From this fall term until next summer, Tony and I will each supervise individual pairs on a monthly basis and host four program-wide online sharing sessions covering four topics relevant to the blind community: Accessibility (comparative policies and infrastructure: blind dogs, tactile sticks and independence), Career (a conversation with blind entrepreneurs, musicians and software developers), Technology (technological trends that help blind people in daily life) and Special Education. Each online seminar will invite two to three guest speakers while involving two voluntary student hosts who work with us. Even though it costs a great deal of effort to help and support each individual pair, we believe it is important to have that level of interpersonal support and track feedback from individual participants carefully. We also believe in the importance of on-going communications with the world outside of the project scope and therefore we have procured a fund of \$1000 to help one staff member and one pair to attend the World Blind Union - Asia Pacific Regional General Assembly 2014, which takes place in Hong Kong on November 21-24, 2014.

Under the help of Joseph Slote, Ambrin Ling and Kera Ling, we also redesigned our logo and the cartoon mascot guide dog Bella. These images will be packaged with our website that aims to offer a larger impact on the society. The website is also a means through which participants get to know how other pairs interact. It will be officially released early October with at least 40 profiles of our peer pairs. It will be a platform through which society learns about what we do and how we make changes happen. We already recorded some of the tutoring sessions that have already begun as examples to help new members navigate through the process.

Section II:

Peace is not a static status; instead, it is an ongoing process of communication. Peace exists when healthy inter-personal communication exists, and fades away when people act upon their own benefits and ignore each other's needs. True peace relies on policies as well as individual level of understanding and caring for each other. The Connected! PeerToPeer project is an ongoing effort to fill the gap between communities that rarely talk. By pairing blind students with high-achieving high school students on a long-term basis, the conversations we have initiated will engage the young generation on an interpersonal level. Furthermore, peace requires in-depth mutual understanding, which is often unachievable on only a theoretical level. This is why micro-level changes have the power to reshape the system. This Project for Peace is in fact the start of an education for a generation that is going to be the models and leaders of our society. Years later, I believe that this communication model will improve and expand to other communities and contribute significantly to the lives of disabled people in China. This Davis Project for Peace reaffirms my belief in initiating micro-level changes and helps me realize that with persistence anyone can be the source of change. Now I think of the world as a stage on which everyone has a chance to discover and solve problems that will make the environment a better one.

"Connected! PeerToPeer challenges participants to overcome the fundamental difficulties of cross-community communications. It is about initiating real growth by helping the young generation to understand and empower each other." — Yawen Chen, Carleton College