

DO YOU
KNOW
THAT...

... children as young as 3 years old copy the way that they cope with life from the person who takes care of them?

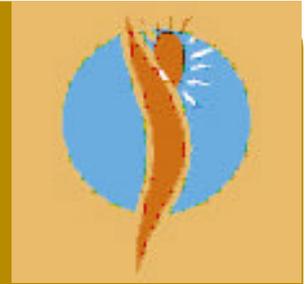
... the psychological impact of child neglect is more severe than the one of child abuse?

... most people who have overcome a trauma say that supportive caregivers and friends are of higher importance than professional services such as psychologists?

... China executes every year more people than the rest of the world together?

IN THIS
ISSUE

Editorial	1
Recently in Children Village	1
Do you know that...	1
Conference on child abuse and neglect	2
Resilience	2
My mother, my sister and I	3
Feedback	3
What's up ?	4
Relevant actuality in China	4
Gamebook	4
Evaluation...	4
Financial Barometer	5



Newsletter

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Editorial

We are making progress

Our activities have grown from being loosely structured and ad hoc support, to structural support to kids and caregivers. Today, our assistance goes beyond trying to meet the basic needs of children. We provide training in aspects of psychology, child protection and we lobby that children receive identity papers.

We have also registered under Belgian law the non-profit organization "Morning Tears". Hopefully, this will contribute to securing two of the three fundamental ingredients of our work: financial means and people who want to get involved as volunteers.

The third ingredient is passion. Passion to rebuild the world for children who have lost their own. Passion to restore playfulness in children who continuously struggle with a question without answer: why me?

January 29, we celebrate Chinese New Year. If all goes well, around that time several children will be able to visit for half a day their mothers in prison. The perspective of a mother's hug provokes endless smiles. The healing power of that afternoon will make them go on again for a while.

You are reading the first issue of the Morning Tears quarterly newsletter. Its intention is to maintain contact with the numerous people who support us. Please forward this newsletter to whoever might be interested. Only together can we make a difference.

Koen Sevenants,
on behalf of the children, their caregivers and the Morning Tears team

Recently in Children Village

- A delegation of the Belgian Province of Antwerp visited Xi'an Children Village. They brought gifts and also good news regarding financial support for our heating system. Temperatures go down in Xi'an to -15 °C. So, a heating system does make a difference!
- Children Village prepares for Woodstock! 12 children are exploring their musical talents. They are learning to play the guitar, and they learn really quickly.
- All the children have moved into the new housing
- The sisters Zhang Na (15 years) and Zhang Hao (13 years) have already been in Children Village for 6 years. Recently, their younger brother joined them. So, now all the children of the family are reunited.

Conference on child abuse and neglect

Child abuse and neglect evokes images of children exposed to physical, emotional and sexual violence, leaving the public with mixed feelings: a sense of helplessness, maybe even embarrassment, but also one of responsibility.

Morning Tears works with and for children who have experienced traumatic events and are likely to have been exposed to violence, abuse and neglect. The organization is deeply committed to offering them opportunities to grow up in a secure and caring environment.

Caring for traumatized children in an institution-like environment with a very high caregiver-child ratio is a huge challenge.

When in November 2005 the All China Women's Association, in cooperation with the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN), UNICEF and PLAN International China, organized a training workshop on child abuse and neglect in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, Morning Tears was present among a large number of national and international organizations, lawyers, teachers, and doctors to participate in discussions around how to help children and how to prevent abuse and neglect in the first place.

The International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) was founded in 1977 and brings together professionals from many different backgrounds to protect children from abuse and neglect worldwide. The multidisciplinary organization provides training and educational events, makes information available to individuals, institutions and organizations and encourages strategies to establish or strengthen national policies and legislation regarding the protection of children. (For more information see website: www.ispcan.org)

The conference was an important opportunity to compare different experiences, establish contacts, and receive feedback and suggestions to problems that Morning Tears is only too aware of in their work with traumatized children.



Resilience

The children we work with have suffered traumas, like the execution or imprisonment of their parents, but also abuse and violence. Some children with traumas become successful adults, others don't. Children who have managed to overcome their traumas have resilience.

Morning Tears has been giving training and lectures on how caregivers can promote resilience in children. For mail info mail to: koen.sevenants@morningtears.com

My mother, my sister and I

My sister and I were born in a remote village of Shan Xi province, which is in the northwest of China. For as long as I can remember, my older sister (Zhou Han) has been around me, for most of my lifetime. She taught me how to play, cleaned my hands, and wiped the tears from my face.

My mum was always busy in the field, and from a very early age, everyday I followed my mother and my sister out into the field with my little shovel. The stars and the moon always accompanied us. But to me, it didn't matter. I liked to be with my mother and my sister. When they were working, I just took care of the food and water and played around. They would look at me and smile from time to time. In the afternoon, we went back home until the next day. Sometimes my sister sang, and taught me something she had learnt from school. This was the most happy hour of the day. My mother would carry me in her arms or on her back...

My home was not a place I really liked to stay, because someone was always screaming at us and beating us. That was my father. He seldom stayed at home, but if he was there, my sister and I would be afraid, because we didn't know what would happen. In my memory, he slapped and kicked my mother very often. I don't know why he did this to my mother. Later on, my sister told me that my father didn't like girls; he liked boys. I didn't understand. Yes, my father never carried me and my sister like my mother did, or like my friends' fathers. Did he dislike my sister and me? But were there any differences, I asked my sister and myself. But there was no answer.

I often dream a dream...

One day, when I came back home with my friends, my father was shouting at my mother. My mother was sitting on the ground, and my sister was squatting in the corner and crying. I knew my father had beaten my mother again. My little friends all ran away. My mother told me to go to my neighbour with my sister. My sister held my hand and ran away. That night we stayed at the neighbour's home. We could not eat. My sister was crying all the time. I was scared so much...

After that night, I could not go home. My sister and I were sent to my uncle's home. For a long time, she didn't talk to anyone, including me. I missed my mother. But I was told we could just stay with my uncle.

When I asked my sister where our mother was, she just cried and told me we could not see our mother for a long time. I didn't know what had happened. But in uncle's home, it was not like our home. My uncle always blamed my sister for being lazy. But she was not. She started work very early in the morning, even when my uncle was still sleeping, and never went to sleep earlier than he did. But he was still not satisfied. He beat my sister with a stick. In the summer, my sister's arms were always black and blue. Sometimes, he beat me as well. I didn't know what I had done wrong. I had to run around in the yard. Some nights I woke up, and heard my sister crying under her quilt.

I also found that changes had taken place in my sister. She tried her best to do the housework, as much as she could. But less and less, she held my hand like before. Instead, when she were not happy, she started beating me...

That time was so hard. We lived that life for almost a year. We were hungry and cold quite often. We had no place to go. Until one day... several uncles with big hats came to my uncle's home, and took us away from the place I never want to return to or think about again.

I remember that was the first time I saw a train. We were taken to a place, where there were lots of kids and some teachers. From then on, our life changed. My sister didn't have to work that much. Both of us could go to school. Teachers took care of us, and showed us how to be polite, and helped me comb my hair and tie a pigtail. Nobody beat us any more. My sister and I made some good friends there. When I felt hungry, I could go to the kitchen...

Sometimes, my sister would beat me slightly for some reason, and the teachers blamed her, but she still did it. So the teachers disliked her, and some of the kids thought she was strange, because of her wordless behaviour. But I understood that the hard time in the past had really changed her. I wished she could be happy, I wished she could hold my hand with a smile like before.

Now I know that the day I stayed in my neighbour's home, my mother had killed my father. She did it because he wanted to sell my sister and me to other people in a far away place, and before that, he had even tried to kill my sister...

I often dream a dream that my mother and my sister and I are walking back home. My mother carries me, and my sister is walking beside me, smiling at me...

Feedback

This is the first issue of our quarterly newsletter. Your feedback will help us to improve. Also, we will be happy to include your contributions or announcements. We look forward to hearing from you. Please mail to: info@morningtears.com

What's up ?

- A governing board of Children Village has been set up. The board includes teachers, coordinators, and most important, some children who represent all the kids.
- Chinese New Year festivities this year will include food, fireworks and volunteers who will invent inspiring games.
- Morning Tears is working on a short video documentary that reflects the problems that the children in Children Village face. The documentary will be finished at the end of February. People can request a copy of the DVD at info@morningtears.com (postal costs will be charged).
- 6 children are preparing to participate in a competition to enter senior high school.

Relevant actuality in China

More than 50 million Chinese children have emotional problems

More than 50 million children suffer emotional and behavioural problems, according to a study by the Beijing University. This is a big increase from the 22 per cent that were affected by these issues at the end of the 70s. The most serious behavioural problems include lying all the time, not going to class or stealing. On the emotional side, the kids suffer mostly from anxiety, fear and depression. According to the experts, one main reason for this situation is the educational system in China, which is very strict, homogeneous and lacking in individual attention to the children. Another important reason is the lack of brothers or sisters, due to the "one child policy", that makes children more shy and introvert. (South China Morning Post)

Beijing to build a new rescue centre for street children

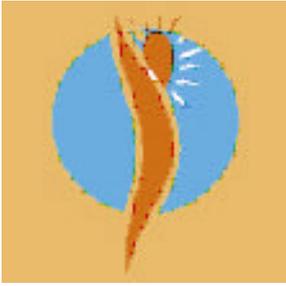
Beijing municipality started in December the construction of a new rescue centre for street children. With an investment of 80 million yuan (about 8,5 million euro), the centre will be completed at the end of 2007 or early 2008. It will have capacity for 900 beds and various classrooms to provide basic accommodation and education to the children. The centre will also receive mentally-challenged and disabled children who have been abandoned by their families. This centre will complement another one set up by Beijing in October 2003. That centre is now full to its utmost capacity, with a total of 1,750 abandoned children. Many of them are from Anhui, Henan and Xinjiang. (Xinhua news agency)

Gamebook

Morning Tears published – with the support of the Belgium Province of Antwerp – a book with 300 'fun tested games' that children and caregivers or teachers can play. The book is in Chinese and intended for schoolteachers, people who work on behalf of children in institutional care and youth movements. One copy costs 18 Yuan or 1,8 Euro. Copies can be ordered at: info@morningtears.com

Evaluation...

Morning Tears invited a child development specialist to do an external evaluation of the work in Children Village. The report concluded that overall, Children Village is on the right track. The report also outlines options to continue our search for quality care. The report can be requested at info@morningtears.com



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Morning Tears rebuilds the world for children who have lost their own world.

Morning Tears rebuilds the world for children who have suffered or are suffering heavy emotional pain.

We focus particularly on:

- Children whose parents are in prison;
- Children whose parents have been sentenced to death;
- Children who have been abused or neglected;
- Orphans;
- Children who haven't been registered at birth, and thus have no rights;
- Street children.

Morning Tears has been operating since 1999 on an informal basis without legal structure. However, in March 2005 Morning Tears became a formal non-profit organization registered under Belgian Law. Currently, Morning Tears has offices in Belgium and China.

Morning Tears is run entirely by volunteers. These volunteers are mostly professionals from the social sector or development aid workers, although we also have journalists and engineers in our group.

The running costs of Morning Tears are kept very low, so that donations can go almost entirely to the children in need.



Financial Barometer

2005 was a difficult year full of challenges. At the start of the year, we were faced with expulsion from the old location and the whole project looked on the verge of having to be closed down. However, we did manage to find financial resources for the new buildings of children village, Thanks to generous contributions by companies and individuals in China and abroad, both foreign and Chinese. Also, we ensured that all basic needs of the children were taken care of. This includes food, clothes, heating, schooling, hygiene and basic medical care. Some funds were used for a short summer camp – we went to the mountains in the outskirts of Xian and enjoyed running around in the clean and open air!! – and for the organization of several visits to the prisons where the parents of some children are being held. The Spanish community in China, the Belgian Province of Antwerp and the organizers of the Canadian Charity Ball were of particular importance in surviving the year 2005 financially.

At the income side, we are happy to see that the number of individual sponsors is increasing. Also, some generous people have undertaken some wonderful initiatives like substi-

tuting X-mas gifts by donations, asking friends to donate instead of bringing gifts to a party celebrating retirement, concerts and get-togethers for the sake of fundraising etc. Also the clothes of the children have been given by individual families.

Our financial situation for 2006 remains fragile. We have financial security for basic needs till April. To fill up the gap up to the end of the year, we will have to find 7800 Euro. We also realized the need to hire a local coordinator, which would cost about 4000 Euro a year. Equipping the therapy room would cost 8000 Euro. If all this is done, then we also hope to find some money for a summer camp.

The task ahead is not small, but after all we accomplished in 2005, we can only hope 2006 will meet our expectations. Right now, we can only say how grateful we are for your contributions. Any one of them, however big or small, has made a big difference to the children. We wish that you could come and see it with your own eyes!! Together, we are rebuilding their world.

Thanks.