
MNCPA member, Echo Huang's efforts help children in China get education

We all know it's getting harder to save for a child's education, but imagine if their schooling cost only \$65 a year... and you still couldn't come up with the money?

Thousands of children living in China's Henen province face that reality every day. That's why MNCPA member and Chinese immigrant Echo Huang is working diligently to change their futures. "I remember many unfortunate people (in China.) I lived in remote villages until I was 12, some without running water," she says. "I can see both sides. I am able to imagine what the orphans go through in their villages."

Those children are victims of a rampant spread of the AIDS virus in the rural Chinese region in the early 1990s. During that period, local farmers made blood donations to raise extra money for their families as part of a government sponsored program. Without their knowledge, many of the villagers contracted HIV through poor donation practices, and soon more than 40 percent of the children were living alone or caring for sick parents.

Local Minnesota dermatologist Steven Wang read about the plight of the rural people in Henan and decided to start a group to provide educational, medical and living assistance. With the help of two organizations, the Minneapolis Foundation and Give2Asia, the China AIDS Orphan Fund was born in early 2003.

Huang, a CPA and Certified Financial Planner practitioner with LPL Financial Services (www.echohuang.com) based in Bloomington, became involved in the project early on after meeting Wang at a networking event. She was immediately interested in the project and agreed to come on board, eventually serving on the 13-member steering committee. "I've gone through a lot in my life and now some would say I'm living my American Dream. I feel fortunate to be able to help."

Armed with good intentions, the group began by raising money locally from family and friends. They made educational efforts their early goal. "Education was our focus because it was less touchy. (AIDS) is a sensitive subject and the government wasn't ready to talk about the crisis," says Huang. The Chinese government only recently admitted the AIDS crisis exists.

By the end of the first year, the China AIDS Orphan Fund raised more than \$30,000 and wrote its first \$10,000

check to enroll nearly 150 children into area schools. Huang says getting results early is important for a fledgling charity. "A new organization is kind of like the chicken and the egg. You need money to show results, but you can't show results without money."

As their nest egg grows, the group plans to increase its efforts. They eventually want to give money to pay for

medicines, infant food and formulas, and funeral expenses. They also hope to help with placing orphans into homes nearer their own villages, rather than being sent to larger institutions farther away. "It's better for an orphan to live closer to the village they are from because they feel more connected."

Huang plays a big part in that fundraising effort. As Corporate Sponsorship Coordinator, she donates her time to give at least one

presentation each month to corporate employees, social groups or networking events in hopes of getting donations. She's also working to increase corporate sponsorships and get more major donors to really get the fundraising moving.

Huang believes this is a global battle that needs to be waged now, not a regional issue people should ignore. "This is a huge crisis. In ten years it will affect everyone in the world."

But her work is also personal. She meets great people through her volunteerism and knows she's making a difference in people's lives and futures. "I'll feel successful down the road, not just because I'm a successful financial planner, but I can see what I've done in the past 20 years to help human beings."

The China AIDS Orphan Fund makes grants to trustworthy and reputable charities, both in the U. S. and China, working especially in Henan province. Huang and other committee members have raised more than \$71,000 since the creation of the Fund. To learn more about the AIDS situation in China and make a donation, please visit the website www.chinaaidsorphanfund.org or contact Echo Huang at 952-854-9230.

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