

# **Dream Project 2004**

Rural China Education Assistance  
Program by International Volunteers

May 30- July 3, 2004  
China

**Dream Corps**  
**[www.dreamcorps.org](http://www.dreamcorps.org)**

## **Dream Project 2004 Summary**

2004 summer was the pilot phase of Dream Corps's volunteer initiative that intends to promote rural development in China and to bridge the overseas Chinese students, scholars and professionals as well as international community with impoverished rural people in China. In June 2004, Dream Corps organized its first corps of international volunteers to China for its rural education assistance program. In this pilot project, fifteen volunteers (11 from the U.S. and 4 from China) spent three weeks in teams in three rural sites in China and experimented with a series of programs aimed at enhancing education opportunities for children there.

### **Major Achievements**

- Opened and developed a student-run school library at Lingfang Central Elementary School in Hunan Province.
- Built staffed information station for Xiezhuang Village in Cao County, Shandong Province.
- Supported and funded the opening of a locally initiated community library at Lichuan County, Jiangxi Province.
- Participated in teaching in local schools in three sites.
- Held the First Beijing Annual Forum on Rural Education and Volunteerism.

### **Activity Details by Locations**

#### **Hunan Program**

– Pilot Study on Library Project and Understanding Rural Education in the Larger Context.

#### **Program Site and Duration of Stay:**

Hunan Province, Chaling County, Lingfang Township, *May 31—June 15*

Hunan Province, Xiangxiang County, Longdong Township (湖南省湘乡市龙洞乡) *June 16—June 17*

Hunan Province, Longhui County (湖南省隆回县) *June 18—June 19*

Hunan Province, Yueyang City (湖南省岳阳市) *June 20*

#### **Participants:**

Harold Chen (Duke University)

HongSheng Jiang (Duke University),

Mu Heng (University of Pennsylvania),

Jiajia Wang (University of Pennsylvania),

Ziqiang Xiao (Beijing-based Scholar)

Hongping Jiang (local volunteer),

Lijun Tong (local volunteer),

Zhao Zheng (local volunteer),

Projects completed at Lingfang Township (聆舫乡):

1. Library Project feasibility research at seven schools (six elementary school and one middle school)
  - Visited seven schools and analyzed the possibility of opening school library in each.

2. Pilot Library Project at Lingfang Central Elementary School (聆舫乡中心小学):
  - Opened a school library that was previously closed.
  - Developed a student-run management structure for the library that is adopted by the school (in order to promote leadership and responsibility in the students by minimizing teachers' involvement).
  - Organized a prized teacher essay contest (recognized by the County Education Bureau) to motivate teachers' enthusiasm of utilizing the library for teaching.
  - Motivated the opening of a reading room.
3. Book Donating at Lingfang Elementary School
  - Total of 284 books donated (carefully picked book brought from Beijing).
  - Initiated further book donation from one of the volunteer's network in Beijing.
4. Book Donating at other six schools
  - Book prize donated to encourage selected students.
5. Teaching and Training at Lingfang Elementary School
  - Each volunteer taught a class.
  - Conducted multimedia-training sessions for teachers.
  - Donated a digital library of over 50 educational videos, several digital encyclopedia, educational software, and e-books.

Projects completed at Xiangxiang County, Longhui County and Yueyang City (湘乡市龙洞乡, 隆回县, 岳阳市):

1. Understanding the larger context of elementary school education
  - Visited 4 middle schools, 2 elementary schools, and 1 university.
  - Conducted interviews with school officials and teachers (valuable information on local school official corruption, art and folk history were collected)
  - Analyzed the flow of student population across geographical areas (counties) and grade levels (from elementary school to university).
  - Visited the home of Weiyuan, important Qing Dynasty intellectual that remains an important site for middle school patriotic education.

### **Shandong Program**

– Pilot Study on Information Village and Understanding Rural Education through Teaching.

#### Program Site and Duration of Stay:

Shandong Province, Louzhuang Township of Heze City (山东省菏泽市曹县楼庄乡) *June 3- June 21*

#### Participants:

Danxian Xie (Duke University)  
 Katie Xiao (Duke University)  
 Calvin Kung (Duke University)  
 Sara Kile (Fulbright Scholar, formerly Columbia University)  
 Christina Hsu (Duke University)  
 Chris (Princeton University)

Projects completed at the site:

1. Pilot Information Village Project
  - Conducted research on local agricultural product market.
  - Conducted research on the feasibility of internet-based market (cost-benefit analysis, inquiry of local support, and implementation plan).
  - Built website for introducing village agricultural product and information.
  - Built village information station (donated computer, internet equipment; recruited local station manager) at Ciezhuang Village (谢庄村).
2. Understanding rural education through teaching
  - Each volunteer taught classes in their field of specialty for the entire duration of the stay at Louzhuang County Middle School (曹县楼庄乡中学).
  - Classes included math, English, history, and music.
  - Conducted after school interest group study.
  - Conducted interviews with teachers and school officials at Heze No.1 Middle School, Huangkou Middle School, and Zhongyi High School (菏泽一中,黄口中学, 忠义学校).

### **Yunnan Program**

– Pilot Study on the Feasibility of Library Project and an Account of Rural Children’s lives through Photography.

#### Program Site and Duration of Stay:

Yunnan Province, Tucheng Township of Zhaotong City (云南省昭通市昭阳区土城乡) June 23—July 3

#### Participants:

Lei He (Beijing University)

Da Liu (Duke University)

Projects completed at the site:

1. Library Project feasibility research at two elementary schools
  - Analyzed the possibility of opening school library in the two schools.
  - Written a comprehensive report on the feasibility of the Library Project at the two schools.
2. Donating sports utility to Sankeshu Elementary School (三棵树小学) (what the school needed most)
3. Documented minority village life and school life through photography
4. Suggested Seedling Fund Project as a replacement of the Library Project at this particular site

### **Jiangxi Community Library Program**

– Supporting Local Initiative on Creating Public Space.

#### Program Site:

Jiangxi Province, Lichuan County (江西省黎川县)

Through our Dream Corps member Jiang Hongsheng, we got in touch with Tu Xiaohua (涂晓华), a Post-Doctoral Fellow who is now currently in Japan. After hearing about our successful result on the Library Project in Hunan Province, she convinced her family member in her hometown Lichuan, Jiangxi Province (黎川) to open a community library for local children and youths. With the help from her brother who donated a store space and the start-up funding of 400 dollars from Dream Corps, the library was opened on October 20, 2004 in two connected rooms with a total space of 52 square meters and with a collection of 1412 books. The library was named after Dream Corps –“Lichuan Dream Library” (黎川梦想图书室). The library is running with an average of 8 visitors a day, opening 32 hours a week. Dream Corps plans to send a team of volunteer to this site in the summer of 2005 to help the library to expand and gain more local support.

### **The First Dream Corps Beijing Annual Forum**

--Promote exchange of thoughts and experiences of rural development and volunteer activities.

#### **Program Site:**

Peking University, Beijing.

The Dream Project’s summer activities culminated at a half-day conference held on the campus of Peking University in Beijing. Dream Corps organized this conference to bring together experts of rural China research, such as Tianjian Shi of Duke University and Liu Laoshi of China Economic System Reform Agency, experts of NGO, such as Tong Zhihui of Tsinghua’s NGO Institute, and representatives and volunteers from other NGOs and student organizations devoted to rural development as well as the principals of three schools for migrant workers’ children in Beijing.

The Dream Project volunteers presented their work and reflections. Other experts and NGO representatives then introduced their work in the field. While the participants amply commended the Dream Project’s cross-Pacific volunteering stride, they never hesitated to voice their concerns. “How do you make sure your endeavor will persevere when bursts of enthusiasm subside? How are you to avoid top-down imposition of a ‘solution’ conceived without bottom-up participation? Will what you call ‘information’ that comes through a dialup connection turn out to misinform in the specific rural context? How will you manage your organization’s relationship with the government at various levels?” are some of the questions generated engaging discussion at the conference and continued reflection among the Dream Project’s volunteers afterwards. More subjects attracted the attention of the Dream Project’s volunteers – the ongoing debate about “education for excellence” versus “education for exams” and the burgeoning schools for migrant workers, getting them to think hard about how their future work may fit in such complicated social dynamics.

## Meet Dream Corps Summer Volunteers

**Katie Xiao**, *junior in a political science, Duke University. 2004 volunteer, working in Louzhuang Village in Shandong Province.*



“I had never visited a Chinese village before volunteering with Dream Corps. I joined because I am Chinese-American and saw Dream Corps as a way to actively address my concerns about poverty and imbalanced development in China.

I learned many things which foreigners almost never see. Despite their individual hardships, the villagers faced their daily tasks with courage and offered a strong support net for each other.

One time, several villagers—putting down their sickles momentarily and taking a break from wheat reaping—had asked us to sing them American songs. I became singing sensations and celebrities.

In the classroom, being a native English speaker, I was in an ideal position to bring an entirely different world alive for them. After the classes, the kids always crowded around me to ask me to sign their books and write encouraging messages in English to them.

I was sad to leave. The students and I had been joined together briefly to be dreamers, dreamweavers, and dream-teamers. Their living conditions had not prevented them from being enthusiastic. Seeing the kids had reinforced my belief that they deserved their chance in life.”



**Liu Da**, *sophomore Duke University. 2004 volunteer, working in Yunan Province.*

“I’ve always wanted to devote myself to improving the education standard in rural China. In the past summer, Dream Project offered me this invaluable opportunity to participate in their pilot program in Yun Nan province of China. I spent three most memorable weeks of my life with the children there learning what I could not have learned elsewhere. It was a truly exciting experience – being with the children from sunrise to sunset and seeing how they live their lives. It was also inspiring to work with other volunteers who share the same beliefs, it made me think that we together can make a change.

It strikes every time when I see talented individuals cannot pursue the education programs they deserve because of economic hardships. I am certain that many oversea Chinese students have the same kind of emotions and impulses, but for various reasons, they find it hard to transform their thoughts into actions. I must say that you can only see the possibilities when there is zero distance between you, and them.”

**Wang Yu**, *Ph.D. student in Cultural Anthropology Department, Duke University.*



“During my field-trip to Yunnan last summer as Dream Corps member, I visited a couple of villages where a few ethnic-minority people live. I found that many girls, instead of going to school, sang and danced to tourists for money. I met a “singing and dancing” group of 16 girls, aged from 4 to 14, bargaining price in Mandarin with the visitors who came to see the magnificent Rice-Terracing Landscape in the area. Among these girls, only three of them went to the primary school before but not even finished, and the rest had never been to school. When I asked them if they wanted to go to school or to dance for tourists, all of them answered me in a loud voice – “Go to school!” But right then, the youngest girls in the group came to me and said, “My mom always tells me that the purpose to go to school is to be able to make money after that, but if I can make money (by dancing) now already, why do I need go to school?” – Stunned by her question, I felt all the girls were looking at me at that moment, waiting for an answer ...

I don’t know why I didn’t give “a lecture” at that moment to answer that girl’s question instead of saying nothing. But deep inside, I did feel more convinced, once again, that there is such a stronger need and necessity for Dream Corps to help – not only the girls – but their parents in rural China to understand that: For their children, school means much more than just making some quick money! ”