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Become a Member

The constitution of the SCCG states that we are a membership organisation, and we're delighted to have members from all the main church denominations and from partner organisations in Scotland. Individuals can also become members. There is no cost, but membership ensures you are kept up-to-date with our work and activities. Contact Patricia Johnston if you'd like to know more (details below).

Contact Us

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Caritas

The SCCG Advisor, Patricia Johnston recorded a short Zoom interview in February with Father Joseph, the Director of the Caritas Social Service Centre, to be shown at our AGM in March. Tricia says, "Prior to recording the interview section we had a very interesting conversation about some of the issues he has been reflecting upon. For example, how can the Church offer support to the most vulnerable in society? What kind of 'language' do Christian agencies/staff need to develop/use that enables people who have no faith or are wary of faith based services feel comfortable accessing or seeking their support? What additional professional training do Church staff need to undertake to be seen by hospital/local authority staff as having something worthwhile to offer society?"

The SCCG Management Committee is planning a further Zoom call with Father Joseph to explore these questions further and to see what assistance we may be able to offer.



Father Zhang in Scotland in November 2019

Fundraising

Raising funds to support work in China is becoming increasingly difficult, for a number of reasons. We are always on the look out for someone to assist in writing funding applications so if you, or anyone you know, has relevant experience please consider offering a few hours a week to the SCCG. Alternatively, you may like to think about setting up a monthly Direct Debit or Standing Order to donate small, regular, amounts to the work of the SCCG or organising a one-off fund raising event.

Masters Update



As you may know we have responded to partner requests for further education and training by supporting an opportunity for two of our partners to study degree courses online. These are Chu Chaoyu, an Amity Foundation Associate General Secretary (Social Services Division) who plans to start a Masters in Dementia Studies online course at the University of Stirling later this year. The other online degree that we're enabling one of our partners to undertake, the Masters in Inclusion and Special Educational Needs at the University of Birmingham, will be taken by Ma Xiaobo of the Amity Children's Development Centre in Nanjing. Both these courses are one-year long.

Academic qualifications are important professionally in China, and gaining relevant degrees will allow these two members of Amity's staff to be considered as speaking with more authority and influence, in addition to their professional experience. In the coming months our two Masters candidates, Ms Ma and Mr Chu, will be taking their IELTS (International English Language Testing System) tests, the successful passing of which is a requirement before they begin their university studies. They are both working incredibly hard on their English language courses while still holding down full time roles with The Amity Foundation. Not an easy task. We wish them well with their tests and look forward to them both beginning their Masters courses in September 2022.

Autumn Plenary 2022

Last September we introduced a different format for the SCCG Autumn Plenary. Instead of a meeting with an agenda, we decided to have a single guest speaker. This new format worked well and the feedback we have received has been very positive. In September 2021 Wendy Alexander was our guest speaker, with a talk reminding us of the historic and ongoing links between Scotland and Shenyang. Is there something you would like to be the focus for the 2022 Autumn Plenary? Get in touch and we'll see if we can make it happen!



Wendy Alexander at our Plenary in 2021

Barbour Trust Fund

The SCCG remains grateful for the generous support of the Barbour Trust over many years. We have recently submitted a number of funding requests to them for projects and core funding. The trustees meet at the end of March this year, with written submissions (due to the ongoing pandemic).

Scottish Churches China Group

苏格兰教会中国会



NEWSLETTER



Photo: © The Amity Foundation

New opportunities

When we had to cancel our 2020 visit to partners in China due to the pandemic, the hope and expectation was that it would take place in 2021. But then, of course, that had to be postponed as well. Surely it would take place in 2022? Well, maybe not! Throughout the pandemic, China's international borders have effectively been closed, preventing almost anyone from getting in or out, and there is no sign of the stringent 'zero-Covid' strategy being relaxed by Chinese authorities any time soon. Although the vast majority of Chinese citizens have been vaccinated, in the past few months China has experienced its largest Covid-19 outbreak since April 2020. This has reinforced the emphasis on their 'zero-Covid strategy' rather than a consideration of how the country learns to live with the virus. While this remains the policy then a partner visit cannot take place. Having said that, the one thing we have learned from this pandemic is that things can and do change from month to month and we will be keeping informed about possible opportunities for travel.

In the meantime, while we wait for things to open up, the SCCG has applied for funding to pay for an external facilitator to conduct a root and branch review for us. With the ever-changing situation in China, it was felt now was a good time to just take a step back and reflect on what we have achieved and what future priorities may be. This review will include looking at our constitution and our charitable purposes. Among the other questions that will be considered are: have our priorities changed/do they need to change? Who are the stakeholders we want to reach? How do we fund any work we wish to undertake? We're looking forward to benefiting from this sort of review, which many charities go through as a matter of course. If we are successful with our funding application the review process will go out to tender as a first step. We will be involving our members and friends in the process and will keep all those interested in our work updated as we go.

Symposium on Autism, Nanjing 2021

by Jasmine Miller

I recently had the opportunity to contribute (via a pre-recorded presentation) to the 11th Symposium on Autism in Nanjing on 4th November 2021. More than 13,000 people attended this conference online, co-organised by the Amity Foundation and the Nanjing Brain Hospital Affiliated with Nanjing Medical University. During the conference, professionals from England, Scotland and China presented the latest insights into inclusive education and policy, practice, and research on diagnostic and principles of therapeutic intervention.

My partnership with the Scottish China Church Group and the Amity Children's Development Centre in Nanjing spans over several years, beginning in 2013. In my role as Principal of New Struan School (part of Scottish Autism), Rev Patricia Johnston approached me originally about presenting at an international Autism conference in Nanjing that year. This was a fantastic opportunity to share the work of the school community and learn about the services supporting children and adults with a variety of learning needs in China. I welcomed a reciprocal visit in 2014, from some of the Children's Development Centre staff. They were interested to see and learn about how we supported children, young people, and adults across our services at Scottish Autism.

The partnership continued to flourish through coaching and a return trip to China in 2018, supporting the staff team through self-evaluation processes and strategic planning. It has been a privilege to be involved with the SCCG and Amity and to engage with teams of committed, aspirational and resourceful staff who aim to provide outstanding services to children, young people and adults with autism and other learning difficulties in China. My most recent presentation at the Symposium last year was about inclusive education in Scotland. It was also a chance to share insights from my current



Some Chinese students participating in the online Seminar Photo: ©The Amity Foundation

doctorate research at Stirling University, exploring how we reimagine equity in education for neurodiversity children and young people.

The term 'neurodiversity' is used to describe the experience of neurological diversity (including brain structures, connections, and functions) that is a feature of all of us as humans. Neurodiversity means there is a wide variation in brain processes, and therefore in individuals' experiences and behaviours. In the ten years between 2009-2019, there was an increase from 5.4% to 30.9% of children and young people with a recorded neurodiversity in Scottish Schools. The global pandemic has had an even greater, disproportionate impact on children and young people as they have faced reduced access to vital care, education, and support and well as to valued activities.



Jasmine Miller in China in 2018 with SCCG partners

The Scottish Strategy for Autism launched in 2011 and concluded in 2021. This outcome-focused strategy had four key areas: 'A Healthy Life', 'Choice and Control', 'Independence' and 'Active Citizenship'. It supported and funded a wide range of activities and developments at local and national levels designed to improve services and supports for autistic people and their families/carers. Valuable resources were created, and new and additional services delivered. Overall, the evaluation of the Strategy concluded that to have greater impact, the services and support need to have greater reach, become embedded and be sustained across all local authorities. Systemic change can only be realised in true partnership with autistic people and through collaboration across services and sectors.

I was very happy to share these findings and the presentation was very well received. I'm told that 11,908 people went online to listen to it!

I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to Demi Tian from Dollar Academy, who did an outstanding job translating my presentation with such care.



Revitalising Rural Life

On 21 February 2021, the Chinese government released the report "Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Comprehensively Promoting Rural Revitalization and Accelerating Agricultural and Rural Modernization". The report said rural revitalisation was a top priority for the whole country and urged the use of all parts of society to accelerate the modernisation of agriculture and rural regions, and eventually to provide a better living standard for the rural population.

Our partner in China, The Amity Foundation, has been involved in revitalising rural areas and improving the quality of life for people living there for many years. They are developing new projects all the time, and we have been in contact with them recently to find out more about particular projects. We hope to update you about this in our next Newsletter.

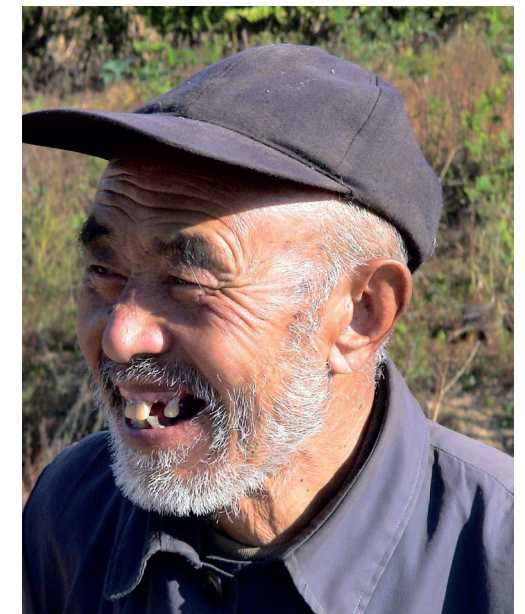
General Secretary Ling Chunxiang of the Amity Foundations say, "In the past two to three decades, rural populations migrated from the countryside to the cities for work and go back home during festivals. They do it back and forth, like migratory birds. The main reason is that the local economic development is so slow and the growing material and cultural needs of farmers can hardly be met.

"In many regions of western China, not only in rural areas but also in many county-level towns, the population keeps decreasing... To solve this

problem, we need to address the root cause. [And] what can social organizations do? In early days of Amity, we provided assistance in impoverished areas. In the recent 10 years, we have explored innovative ways for the development of rural communities, such as the protection of traditional culture, establishment of agricultural cooperatives in ethnic minority areas, and the promotion of rural tourism."

The Amity Foundation emphasises that the core of the implementation of the programs is the development of human beings... In Amity's opinion, villagers are the main source of local development, as well as the direct beneficiaries of the projects. They fully participate in the decision-making and managing process in project planning, implementation, monitoring and assessment.

Amity says villages need to be well chosen for revitalisation projects, and they base this on previous community initiatives. Their Community Development Fund and Community Governance project provides a development fund for the target village. Similar to microfinance, the fund will be borrowed by villagers who need to develop their own income over time.



A poor farmer in Liaoning Province



Farming in Yunnan Province Photo: Photo by Matt Briney on Unsplash