

Chickenshed & Hunan Aimier

Report on EU-China NGO Twinning program

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Chickenshed and Hunan Aimier are both non-profit organizations with the main aim to access previously excluded groups into mainstream activities. Chickenshed specializes in using theatre and the performing arts to integrate disabled children, young people at risk of offending or children within lower socio-economic backgrounds. Aimier is committed to the rehabilitation, education and vocational training of people with intellectual disabilities and children with autistic disorder. Aimier saw the potential and value of performing arts for their organization and they both started working together in 2012, in order to bring inclusive theatre to the city of Changsha. With this recent exchange they not only had the possibility to develop professional workshop models for different age groups, but also to develop plans for a sustainable partnership.

Dave Carey, Chickenshed

Between 12th and 25th January 2014, Dave Carey and his colleague Charlie Kemp visited Hunan Aimier in Changsha as a part of the EU- China NGO-Twinning Program.

The two came to Hunan with the **objectives** to share, train and help build sustainability in the practise of inclusive theatre in China. This can mean bringing some disabled children into a group of mainstream children and creating a performance piece that helps to unlock their creativity and gain a wider understanding of the society within which they live. The aim of this particular project was to help support Aimier in the development of this provision within Changsha initially and then disseminate to a wider population.

Supporting inclusive theatre in China: Achievements

The main thrust of the partnership has been to train practitioners and through this process produce a theatre show involving an inclusive group of children from the Changsha area.

- A script and songs were developed during October – January.
- In January a 20 minute version of the show was performed by 30 children, aged 8 – 12. (This included 5 children with autism who attend care within Aimier’s existing framework). The performance was watched by an audience of nearly 100 parents, teachers and social workers.
- Script developments are being under taken ahead of final performances in a theatre (August)
- 20 practitioners from across China have undertaken certificated training.
- Aimier now has a team of 3 workshop leaders/directors and a support/volunteer team of 6.
- Local authorities, media and key stakeholders are taking a keen interest in the project.

Evaluation

This twinning, although beset with problems in achieving an each way visit has been an unqualified success.

Throughout the 6 month period there has been an excellent exchange of training and information via regular Skype meetings and 'we chat' conversations. The visit to Changsha resulted in a performance by 30 children to parent, carers, and interested parties. There were many successful meetings aimed at identifying future partners, funders and creative collaborators.

A weeks training with 20 participants from all over South-East China allowed Chickenshed to demonstrate its 'train the trainer' approach which will go a long way to strengthening the sustainability of such a project.

An excellent relationship with Hunan TV which was cemented during the visit to Changsha will result in a mass market documentary which will be an excellent and compelling tool in forming public opinion on these issues.

Hunan-Aimier now allocates several hours a week to a staff member to manage the project as well various hours to staff members to be involved in the project. They are also now running weekly performing arts workshops for 30 young people every week.

There are on-going discussions about the development of workshops for extended age groups creating a second workshop aimed at teenagers and a third workshop aimed at younger children – (6-8).

Outlook for future collaboration

The outlook for future collaboration and partnership looks very strong in deed. A proposed trip to Changsha in July has been part funded by an organization based in Hong-Kong. This will result in a full theatre production to which many officials, local government officers, and potential funders will be invited. Further funding is expected to be gained from Hunan TV and further expressions of interest have been expressed by Hunan University.

Various creative collaborations are under discussion and Chickenshed are investing time in developing a 'distance learning facility' using Skype and video.

More detailed information is given in the long reports of the twinners. Anyone interested can contact the Stiftung Asienhaus staff/China program to receive more information.