



Community Center Shanghai: Your home away from home

老外之家——上海众心社区中心执行总监斯塔女士专访

■ TEXT / Diana ■ PHOTO / Provided by the CCS

上海众心社区中心的前身是设立在上海浦东金桥地区的上海协和国际学校内的家庭中心，成立于1998年，是一家为在华工作和生活的外籍人士提供各类生活服务，趣味课程，培训，志愿者机会，慈善项目等丰富多彩活动的非营利性机构。其品牌慈善项目爱心树从2003年开展至今，已累计送出礼物包裹80461个，累计赠送金额价值在2000万元人民币以上。

About the CCS

Community Center Shanghai (CCS) was founded in 1998 to replace the Family Center of the Concordia International School Shanghai which is located at the Shanghai Jinqiao Export Processing Zone.

The zone is housed by multiple investments from foreign enterprises, like General Electric and General Motor, where foreign nationals settle into the local lifestyles. For those who stay at home and don't have to work, however, life may turn out to be boring, not to mention the language barriers. Eager to connect with each other, they set up what they called a family center to meet friends and exchange views.

The center's earliest tradition is the Coffee Connection, during which free coffees were provided and lecturers invited to speak on, among other topics of interest, Chinese cultures, lifestyles, and tourist attractions. Later Chinese language courses were added to the agenda.

The growing curriculum and membership had encouraged the family center to operate under its new name, Community Center Shanghai and, with the help of two specialists from Community Center Taiwan, venture into charity, cultural exchange, psychological consulting, and language teaching.

About the Giving Tree

Since 2003, Giving Tree, the branding program of the CCS, has provided underprivileged children with 80,461 gift packages worth over 20 million yuan.

It began as an idea that took shape when Joanne Gao Price, wife of the former chairman of the Boeing Company, asked her neighbors to prepare extra Christmas gifts for children of impoverished families.

Ms. Price put forward the idea at the Coffee Connection and received active response from other members. The first batch of 32 gifts was sent to 32 migrant children in Shanghai who were introduced during her visit to the city.

The following year, the CSS gave away over 2,000 gifts; in 2008, colleagues of the CSS members joined them to put together more than 6,000 gifts.

Now, the CSS is jointly advancing the project with the Shanghai Charity Foundation, who is responsible for providing contact information of the migrant children. The key to the sustainability of the project, according to the CSS, is to make sure the 250 yuan worth of gift package go to the child who needs it most.

What the Giving Tree wants is not only to help the poor but to change people's definition of giving. "When donors asked if they could donate used clothes or shoes, we said no," said Stella Si, CCS Executive Director. "We hope they give unused gifts just like they would to their own children."

The CSS checks over every donated gift package to

make sure everything inside is brand new. Taking account of children's natural partiality for toys, the CSS keeps reserves in case donors forget it.

Last Christmas, the CSS brought 106,000 gifts to children of 12 schools, including nine outside Shanghai. Beyond that, the CSS is considering providing sports and art facilities for migrant schools.

Last year, a badminton team of migrant children was sponsored by the CCS in cooperation with Concordia International School Shanghai. This year, Shanghai American School Pudong Campus will work with the CSS to build a team of talented long-distance runners at a local migrant school.



Kids receive gifts from the CCS



Cultural bridge

As a multi-national organization, the CCS also serves as a bridge between the Chinese and Western cultures. To help foreign workers adapt, the CSS invented the Decoding China plan to host lectures on a range of subjects from Chinese traditional arts to martial arts, and from the Chinese language to Shanghai architecture.

In the past decades, the CSS, committed to the mission of connecting and inspiring expats in Shanghai, has been serving as a window for them to make friends, engage in charity, and seek insights into the local culture.