

**Walsh Leadership Award Project:
The Abandoned Children of China**



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Proposed Project:
The Abandoned Children of China

On a cold Autumn evening in a village of Southern China, a man carrying his baby girl, not even a week old, walked across the moist field to a nearby bridge. He stopped at the middle of the bridge, and without a word, without a tear, threw his newborn daughter into the cold, harsh river below. He walked away with no second glance and no remorse, as his helpless baby daughter plunged to her death. No one heard her cries, stifled by the raging water. No one came to her rescue.

That man was my mother's cousin. That girl was my second cousin.

It was the night the magic ended. The magic of birth, of love, of life.

For years, I've fought to gain that magic back. I felt so ashamed of this man, my "uncle". My deep sorrow for his little girl has motivated me to devote part of my life to helping girls like her, who are abandoned without a chance at life.

In China, hundreds of thousands of children are abandoned each year. Because of this, there are currently 3 million children in China's orphanages. 90 percent of these orphans are girls. This is a result of the one-child policy, implemented in 1979, as an effort to control the overpopulation in China. From a cultural standpoint, the sons carry the responsibility of continuing their father's lineage and supporting the family. Girls, on the other hand, are not cherished in the same manner. Although this is only a general mindset of the people of China, it has serious implications. After the one-child policy was implemented, parents desperate for a boy began abandoning their baby daughters, in the hopes that their next child will be a boy. Additionally, babies born with mental or physical handicaps are deserted as well. These babies, like my second cousin, are abandoned, like bags of garbage, in dumpsters and alleyways every day.

My fairy tale life began in Guangzhou, China where I was raised by my parents who loved me indiscriminately. To build a better future for me, they moved to the U.S. and left me under my grandparents' care. During this time without my parents, I experienced a glimpse of what the orphans of China have felt their entire lives. Years after my parents' financial struggle and determination, we were finally reunited. I was soon swooped away to the suburbs of Chicago under the canopy of wealth, snugly tucked in my cozy bubble. Yet, this suffocating atmosphere only fueled my ignorance of reality and hardship.

Despite my parents' protection, I'm ready to break out of this isolated view of the world. I want to see the true struggles of life, and there's no better place than at the orphanages in China, especially at a place that houses physically handicapped orphans. As dedication to my cousin, this is my chance to help the abandoned Chinese children and reconnect with my roots. If I am not there for them, then who will be?

The goal of my project is to interact with orphans by working full-time alongside Amanda de Lange, who has started a foster home called Maple Leaf in Xian, China. Maple Leaf's vision is to care for sick children who are days from dying. Amanda brings these orphans to her home at Maple Leaf and nurtures them until they become healthy enough for adoption. She also plans and obtains funding for the children who require more serious medical attention such as surgeries for heart defects or cleft palates. Many of these children that Amanda saves are baby girls, just like my little cousin.

Although my proposal focuses on helping the abandoned girls, I will treat both girls and boys with equal compassion. My ultimate goal is to rescue the sick and abandoned babies who are in the most need. At Maple Leaf, Amanda will provide me with housing accommodations so I am with the children almost all the time. My project is divided into four categories: day-to-day care, medical attention, fundraising and scrapbooking.

For day-to-day care, I will be supervising one of the apartments that make up Maple Leaf. I will make sure that all the babies are cared for and that everything runs smoothly. I will also directly provide physical and emotional support for the children. Additionally, I will teach them English, which will be helpful if they become adopted by English-speaking parents or can help them succeed in life in China

For medical needs, I will arrange and take the children to doctor appointments. I will also contact Chinese medical specialists and if necessary, American physicians, for the babies who require more serious medical attention. If I need to consult an American specialist, I will make traveling arrangements and oversee the children's proper treatment.

I will also fundraise for Maple Leaf, which currently houses 17 babies. Most of them require medical care, which is mainly funded through sponsors. My ability to speak Mandarin and English allows me to contact local and international organizations to ask for support. The money will go toward the children's day-to-day and medical needs. I will also create a video montage of the babies to raise awareness of abandoned children in China, especially of medically disabled girls.

My final objective is to create a scrapbook for each child. This allows the children to grow up knowing their stories and having a voice to tell others. The scrapbooks will contain excerpts of journal entries, drawings and pictures. I can present the scrapbook to the adoptive parents as a physical depiction of the children's identity and past.

The above outlines my primary goals. However, I hope to maximize my service with a couple of other aims. In addition to working with Amanda, I would like to spend time volunteering at the local orphanage where Amanda has formed a strong relationship with the staff. I want to mentor and implement a program for both the current and future orphans which focuses on the emotional and psychological needs. Some ideas include creating one-on-one sessions between staff and orphan, focusing on the children's feelings and creating a weekly presentation for the older children to gain "life skills" experience. They may be given a "challenge" at each session such as solving a dispute

with a co-worker. I can create a lasting impact by applying my psychology and business background toward developing this program.

As a future physician, my goal is to provide assistance to the most vulnerable populations. Therefore, I first need to understand hardship through the young eyes of a sick orphan and gain a more grounded perspective of life so I can understand my patients' struggles and pain. In the future, I will also travel back to these orphanages to provide medical attention to the handicapped children. When no one will care for them, I'll provide love for them. When no one will give them a second chance because of their disability, I will provide them with medical attention. When no one will give them a chance at life, I will motivate them to succeed.

This project is only the beginning of my lifelong devotion to this incredible cause. I do it for my country, for my fellow Chinese girls, and most of all, for my dear cousin. I will, and always will, fight to win that magic back.

Leadership Accomplishments

I have been very fortunate throughout my life to be supported by my loving family and guided by inspiring mentors. I am forever grateful for the opportunities and guidance that they have offered me, and I am inspired to pass this on to others who aren't as fortunate as I was. In high school, I was a guidance mentor to academically and socially troubled students at my high school. In addition, I participated in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS) program where I served as a mentor for an 11-year old girl, Kaley, who was having difficulty adjusting to school. I was awarded a BBBS scholarship for my dedication to this program, and I wanted to continue working with children in college. As a student at Hopkins, it is now my turn to give back to both the Hopkins and the local Baltimore community. Two of my most meaningful involvements at Hopkins are with Students Taking a New Direction (S.T.A.N.D.!), a mentoring program for vulnerable Baltimore youth and Alpha Epsilon Delta (AED, the pre-health honor society).

Students Taking a New Direction (S.T.A.N.D.!) is a mentoring program for the underprivileged Baltimore children which I helped re-initiate on campus. These kids come from fragmented families and range in age from 9 to 14. They have had brushes with the law, violent confrontations or school suspensions. This program was originally founded 6 years ago by Westley Moore, a Hopkins alumnus. It was initially successful but it soon fell apart after he graduated and left to complete his Rhodes Scholarship. Inspired by my mentoring experiences both in high school and college, I found out about S.T.A.N.D.! and wanted to start it back up. I especially wanted to make a difference in the local community of Baltimore.

An African American child in Baltimore's public school system has a higher statistical chance of landing in jail than obtaining his high school diploma. I remembered reading this shocking fact and felt the need to address the problem by targeting the most vulnerable children. Although there are many enrichment programs to assist gifted students, there were no mentoring programs to help kids who were already entrenched in

academic and disciplinary problems. Therefore, my friend, Bo Gu, and I worked with Westley in partnership with the Maryland Juvenile Justice Department to re-launch this program at Hopkins. We used flyers and word of mouth to motivate others to join us as mentors for these vulnerable kids. I am currently co-president of STAND!, and we now have 7 mentees in our program. We are recently receiving more interest and enthusiasm from the Baltimore community and Hopkins students to make this program even more successful. We hope to grow bigger with each upcoming year, motivating more Hopkins students to serve their community by becoming mentors to these children. To help reach this goal, I am currently working closely with a couple of younger members of S.T.A.N.D.!, whom I feel confident will carry over as leaders of this organization after I graduate. Furthermore, I will continue to stay in contact with the members of S.T.A.N.D.!, and especially with my mentee, Jonay after I graduate.

In addition to S.T.A.N.D.!, I have had a strong presence in Alpha Epsilon Delta (AED), the national pre-health honor society. Last year, I served as the Mentoring Chair of the Hopkins AED chapter because it gave me the opportunity to directly impact my fellow Hopkins students. I particularly wanted to mentor the underclassmen pre-med students because I felt that when I was an underclassman, I did not have this resource of students who were willing to guide me in the right direction. Although AED had a mentoring program in the past, many of the events were not well publicized or planned. One of my goals as Mentoring Chair was to help AED become more widely known across campus so that more students can take advantage of our program. Therefore, I helped spread the word through fliers, stuffing mailboxes and word of mouth. At our first mentoring event, which consisted of an open question and answer session with a panel of AED students, nearly 100 students came to seek our advice, up from only a dozen the year before. During each mentoring event, I provided my contact information and offered to speak to students individually regarding more personal and specific questions. The time I spent talking to freshmen and sophomores has been one of my most rewarding experiences at Hopkins. I loved sharing my mistakes, my suggestions and simply serving as a friend for the students who felt lost in this new place away from home. One of the main concerns that I addressed was the “cut-throat” pre-med mentality

at Hopkins. I wanted to steer freshmen away from this perspective of Hopkins, because in order to succeed as a future physician, we need to learn to work together rather than against each other. I still remain in contact with many of my mentees today.

This year, as the newly elected AED President, I oversee a group of 70 talented individuals and 7 committees: mentoring, tutoring, community service, awareness, alumni, publicity and fundraising. Motivated by my touching experience as Mentoring Chair last year, I wanted to help transform AED even more. Therefore, I helped launch 3 new committees to AED this year and worked closely with the Pre-professional Advising office at Hopkins to communicate more widely with the rest of the student body. However, we also reach out beyond the Hopkins boundaries and into the local community as well. Our service events include participating in a Breast Cancer walk and preparing snacks for local hungry elementary school students.

In addition, I personally invite and present guest speakers in Hopkins' Conversations with Medicine events. This semester's first speaker was Dr. Douglas Kerr, who gained a lot of publicity lately for his successful stem cell treatment of paralyzed rats. I had the honor to have dinner with him as well as present him to the audience, which was four times larger than previous years. After my graduation this semester, I will actually spearhead a clinical research project under Dr. Kerr's mentorship. Doctors like Dr. Kerr can offer valuable learning experiences to students and directly reach out to students through this speaker series. Over the past year and a half, we have greatly increased AED's presence on and off campus and expanded our diverse programs to enhance student's premed experience at Hopkins. Close communication and active participation has allowed many of the other members to help me reform AED this year, and they will pass on this vision and dedication to the future generations of AED.

It is amazing to personally touch the lives of others from Baltimore's youth to my fellow Hopkins students. There is nothing more fulfilling than to know that I have contributed to making another person's life brighter, even if it was only for one day. I love every aspect of my mentoring experiences at Hopkins, and want to extend them to

my project in China. For the past 7 years, I have dedicated my extracurricular involvement toward helping those who need it most. I want to extend beyond the limits of Hopkins and Baltimore and to care and mentor the children of third world countries, children like the orphans in China.