



Newsletter

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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial	1
What's up In Morning Tears	1-5-6
News from Ai Tong Yuan Children Village	2
Financial Barometer	2
Feedback	2
Morning Tears' Strategy	3
Duet	4-5
News from Morning Tears	6
Psychological Insights	7
News from the World	8-7

Editorial

Aliens and children

So, imagine that your parents were sent to prison and that out of the blue some foreigners show up with the message that they want to help you. The prison sentence of your parents has catapulted you from your home environment into a lonely and dangerous position in which nobody wants to take care of you. Now some aliens show up who look strange and have a very strange accent when they speak. It seems that you ended up on the other end of the milky way, but because of the lack of any alternative – and also because the police tells you so – you accept their offer and you follow them. Welcome to Morning Tears.

International aid programs that involve child care can be overwhelming for children. The international aspect adds on to the already accumulated fear and stresses the total lack of control that children have over their own lives.

The good news is that with Morning Tears it is not really like this. We continuously do efforts to try to look through the eyes of the child. This resulted over the years in great changes in the way we do things.

Some of the changes can easily be accepted by our supporters and donors. We changed for example our intake procedures. When new children arrive we try to keep the involvement of adults to a

minimum. The other children make the newcomers understand that their parents are also in prison or have been executed. The other children let the newcomers see that they are safe with us, that they have food, go to school, have friends and even have fun.

But our donors and supporters do not like all the consequences of looking through the eyes of the children. We leave much of our front-line work in the hands of our Chinese staff. The children see familiar faces. They hardly see the international aspect of Morning Tears. It sounds good, but international good willing volunteers are often not very happy with this. What lacks is the gratification of direct child care. We also do not organize big ceremonies where children dance or sing to express gratefulness to donors. The children are not fund-raising tools. This looks obvious, but unfortunately we already lost several donors for this reason.

Morning Tears is truly committed to doing things right. We keep on working to improve our child protection work in which the child perspective shows us the way. We are grateful to our volunteers and donors who can identify themselves with us. We wish you a magical year of the tiger.

Koen Sevenants
koen.sevenants@morningtears.org

What's up in morning tears? (./...)

- Morning Tears completed its registration in Denmark! We also have a great team of Danish volunteers in Shanghai and the newsletter you are reading now is also available in Danish. Contact Morten for Danish bank details and more info: signe@kuhl.net

News from Ai Tong Yuan Children Village

By: Kou Wei and Katleen Mentens

- Between July and October 16 new children have arrived in Ai Tong Yuan Children Village, bringing the total to 24 children. We now have 8 girls and 16 boys, all between the ages of 6 and 12 years old.
- All the children have undergone and passed the psychical examination.
- During the summer months, two volunteers who majored in Social Work worked with the children and organized various activities.
- During the summer holiday, we organized two activities per week. These activities helped the children open up, bond with each other and their caregivers, and have fun.
- To take care of the newly arrived children, Morning Tears hired two additional caregivers, bringing the total to 6.
- All 24 children have visited their parent(s) in prison once; and 8 children have been there twice already.

Financial Barometer

Overall, there is a new optimism among people who care for the Morning Tears children. The number of donations decreased for a short while, but today everything is again up and running. Energies and enthusiasm are great today. There are some very nice fundraising actions that we would like to share with you, and that could possibly even inspire you:

- Some people decided not to ask gifts for birthday parties. Instead they asked people coming to their parties to donate to Morning Tears. There have been also companies that celebrated an anniversary and they did the same thing.
- Some people have put Morning Tears into their will. After they passed away the Morning Tears children will receive part of their heritage.
- Morning Tears Belgium is selling wine. Morning Tears Finest Red and Morning Tears Finest White are now for sale.
- An international Christmas cards action is up and running. Check on our website if you want to order.
- A great campaign in Shanghai will be launched soon in which wood for your fireplace will be sold. The profit will go entirely to the running costs related to the heating in the winter.
- In Spain there have been some concerts and theater performances devoted to the Morning Tears children.

We can rebuild the world of children thanks to the dynamics of our friends and volunteers. The amount of a lot of donations is small, but all these small donations together really makes us going! In the next issue we will provide an income report of 2009.

Feedback

This is the first issue of the fifth volume of our quarterly newsletter. Your feedback will help us to improve. Also, we will be happy to include your contributions or announcements. We look forward to hearing from you. Please mail to: info@morningtears.org.

If you want to get our previous newsletters, visit our website at www.morningtears.org, You can download them from the site.

Morning Tears' Strategy

In the previous newsletters we explained that Morning Tears uses research-based minimum standards for childcare and protection. In our standards we differentiate seven quality areas, namely: planning for care, protective care, personal care, health, environment and safety, caregivers, management and administration. Here, we will continue to discuss the third quality area: personal care. For our personal care we use 10 standards. In this newsletter we discuss standards 9 and 10.

Standard 3.9: Methods of care, control and the use of sanctions are defined

- Methods of controlling and redirecting children when their behavior is challenging and abusive are balanced with care, respect for the law and children's rights, and maintenance of the child's dignity.
- Unacceptable behaviors are focused on as an indication of the child's need for greater support and guidance rather than for punishment. In addition, children shall not be physically restrained by bonds, ties, or straps for disciplinary purposes.
- Children are involved in reviewing or setting rules and regulations for their care. They are aware of the basic rules that cover social skills, respect for property and rights of others.

Why is this important?

- Corporal punishment is viewed by children as adult aggression rather than as a punishment and can reinforce feelings that the world is a hostile, angry and fearful place.
- For many children, adult aggression has contributed to their problems, and many have run away from or avoided returning to their homes due to fear of adult aggression at home and/or their community.
- When children are involved in making the rules they will have a greater sense of ownership and respect for their compliance.
- Communicating with the child about misbehavior, causes and consequences, and how a more appropriate course of action could have occurred helps the child to better understand the situation, achieve self-control and internalize acceptable standards of behavior.

Standard 3.10: The specific needs of babies and young children are catered for

- Childcare programs have specialized staff and provisions to respond to the needs of babies and young children.
- Staffing rations and work planning reflect babies' and younger children's need for focused attention of a primary caregiver.
- Caregivers hold and cuddle the babies and communicate with them through touch, sound and language.
- Babies and young children are held when being fed and caregivers communicate with them whilst feeding.
- Babies and young children are bathed regularly and are encouraged to play and splash during bath times.
- Toileting and nappy changing procedures are positive experiences and meet every child's individual needs.
- They are not left unattended or left to cry for prolonged periods.
- Particular care is taken to ensure that babies do not become overheated or chilled.
- To reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), infants shall be placed to sleep on their backs unless otherwise directed by the child's physician, and all sleeping arrangements for infants through 12 months of age shall use firm mattresses and avoid soft bedding materials such as comforters, pillows, fluffy blankets, or stuffed toys.
- Babies and young children can only absorb small amounts of food at any one time and should therefore be fed small amounts frequently throughout the day (and night in case of young babies).
- Babies and young children have a birth certificate and an immunization record, detailing the type and date of all necessary immunizations. They are given regular growth and development checks.

Why is this important?

- Babies and young children need attachment and bonding with a primary caregiver. Feeding plays an important role in the development of these bonds (holding the baby while feeding is not only a bonding opportunity but also a safety measure to reduce the risk of choking).
- Babies require interaction with adults as a means to learn communication. Face-to-face contact with babies is therefore extremely important for their development and understanding of communication.
- Babies are susceptible to infections and have limited resources in withstanding prolonged periods of illness; they therefore require extra attention and monitoring.

In the next issue of our newsletter we will talk about our fourth quality area: health.

Duet (./.)

Duet...

a place where two voices speak, shout or whisper;
a place where two minds agree, disagree or clash;
a place where two songs sing harmoniously or create a cacophony;

We asked ourselves whether there are substantial differences between prison visits of children to their incarcerated parents in Belgium and China. In duet, Roland Mentens (former prison warden Dendermonde, Belgium) and Kou Wei (director of Ai Tong Yuan Children Village Zhengzhou, China) give us some insights.

Prison Visits of Children to Their Incarcerated Parent(s) in a Belgian Prison

By: Roland Mentens

Translated by: Katleen Mentens

For a long time, children have had the right to visit their convicted parents in prisons in Belgium; as long as they are accompanied by an adult and that the prisoner has not been deprived of his/her parental rights. These visits take place in the prison's visiting hall and can theoretically take place three times per week.

From the end of the eighties to the beginning of the nineties, quite a few local initiatives to organize special children visits sprang up. Most of the time, these special visit moments happened at or around the time of special occasions: Saint Nicolas, Christmas, New Year, Mother's Day, Father's day, etc.

All this might sounds very normal and commonplace, but back then it was far from customary. Prison visits are subject to strict rules and also the people visiting are subject to strict procedures: they must register; they must go through a metal detector and it is absolutely forbidden to bring anything into the prison.

I clearly remember a young woman and her weeping daughter. The girl had made a beautiful drawing for her dad's birthday, but was not allowed by the guard to bring it inside the prison and give it to her father. Obviously the guard was right, since for security reasons, nothing can be allowed to go in. But at the same time it seemed cruel that a little girl could not give her father a drawing. Right then and there, the real 'Children Visits' started.

From then onwards, all prisons took similar initiatives and from July 2000 the Minister of Justice at the time decided that such 'Children Visits' had to become compulsory in all Belgian prisons.

The Minister stressed that special attention needed to be paid to the relationship a child has with his/her imprisoned father or mother, in order to minimize the results of the incarceration of the parent. Therefore, all prisons have to organize one activity per month that puts the relation parent – child into the spotlight. Furthermore, all imprisoned parents have this right from the moment of their incarnation and this for each minor child.

'Children Visits' can only be denied in case of grave circumstances; e.g. if a judge decides to deprive the imprisoned parent of his/her parental rights; depending on the nature of the crime, etc.

Since the start of 'Children Visits', they have evolved a lot. There are now cooperation agreements with external partners and volunteers, which have made a lot of activities possible, such as, playing, dancing, eating cake, clown performances, Saint Nicolas handing out presents...in other words, these are moments that dads can be dads, moms can be moms, and children can be the sons and daughters of their incarnated parent(s).

And yet, there are still problems that prison can't control. Sometimes children don't get to visit their parents in prison because there is no money to pay for transportation to the prison, or because no one can accompany them, or because the other parent refuses the (ex) partner to see the children.

There still is a lot to do!

Duet (./..)

Visits of Morning Tears Children to Their Incarcerated Parent(s) in a Chinese Prison

Told by: Kou Wei

Written by: Katleen Mentens

Children in China can legally visit their parent(s) in prison once a month. In reality, children only see their imprisoned parent(s) once a year or even less, because the travel distance is too big; they lack the finances to make the trip; or relatives believe it is in the best interest of the child not to see the parent(s). For children visiting their parents in prison, there are not special measures: they see their dad or mom behind glass and they communicate by phone. Touching and hugging are out of the question.

Since Morning Tears cooperates closely with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, it also has special connections with the local prisons and their wardens, and as a result, they can allow children to visit their parents in an entirely different setting.

For many children, a prison visit can be frightening and confrontational. Often they haven't seen their parent(s) for a long time; they have a mistaken idea of the committed crime, their mom or dad. Morning Tears caregivers cautiously prepare the children to such visits. As such (if at their age and in their particular situation can handle it), the caregivers give the children the facts of the crime(s) the parent(s) committed; they ask the children about their emotions surrounding such visit, etc. Often this kind of emotional preparation can take several weeks prior to the initial prison visit.

The 11-year old Xiao Li hadn't seen her mother for years. She expressed in one of the preliminary conversations that her biggest fear was to see her mom in prison clothes. Morning Tears contacted the prison to check for the possibilities of making the visit of Xiao Li to her mom a little easier. The warden took the initiative to go out and buy plain clothes for the mother to wear, as well as some presents she could give her daughter. She also agreed to give Xiao Li and her mom a bit more freedom and privacy during the visit. The mother was allowed to show Xiao Li the immense prison complex (the cell blocks, the work units, the cafeteria, supermarket, the gardens, etc), after which they could share lunch in a private room. The whole visit lasted from 9 in the morning till 3 in the afternoon. Xiao Li left the prison feeling really good about her mom and their relationship. Such visits are immensely important in the children's healing process.

Normally the Morning Tears caregivers don't leave the children's side during the visit; in order to be there for them if they need it. The reunion between Xin Xin and his dad was difficult to say the least. The prison warden had given them a dark room to meet in private. Neither of them knew what to say to one another. All of a sudden his dad started crying inconsolably and this upset Xin Xin deeply. The caregiver had to urge the father to stop crying. Xin Xin did not experience his visit as a positive one.

Morning Tears realized that prison visits to the parent(s) is essential for the children in accepting the situation, the healing process but also in the possible future reunion when the parent is released from prison. Good guidance, constructive connection with local authorities and the prison directors, and the bond between parent(s) and child determine the success of such visits.

There is still a lot to do!

What's up in morning tears? (./...)

- Morning Tears in The Netherlands receives support from 'Wilde Ganzen'. 'Wilde Ganzen' is a charity that focuses in helping other charities. Concretely, if you put your donation on their account and you mention it is for Morning Tears then they will double the amount and transfer it to Morning Tears. Now, also remember that donations in Holland are tax deductible, so actually you almost triple the amount if you donate in The Netherlands. This is the bank account: account number is Giro 40.000 of Wilde Ganzen, please do not forget to mention Morning Tears.



News from Morning Tears

As we face a New Year in the Chinese Zodiac, we want to give some enlightenment as to what the Tiger will bring in the Chinese New Year and what this fierce animal might mean for Morning Tears and our projects.

Excerpts taken from: <http://www.usbridalguide.com/special/chinesehoroscopes/Tiger.htm>

Compiled by: Katleen Mentens

General Traits

The Tiger is said to be lucky, vivid, lively and engaging. Another attribute of the Tiger is his incredible bravery, evidenced in his willingness to engage in battle or his undying courage. Maybe he's so brave because he is so lucky. The Chinese say having a Tiger in the house is the very best protection against any evil.

Tigers are also incorrigibly competitive - they simply cannot pass up a challenge, especially when honor is at stake, or they are protecting those they love. Tigers are unpredictable and it would be unwise to underestimate their reactions. They may appear cool, but they have the Big Cat's instincts to pounce at a moment's warning. Natural leaders, they have a strong sense of dignity. Tigers are intelligent, alert, and farsighted. They have their fingers on the pulse. Good strategists and tacticians.

The characteristics of the Tiger are tempered by one of the five Chinese elements of Metal, Water, Wood, Fire and Earth overlaying a 5-year cycle of characteristics on the original 12-year cycle.

The Metal Tiger in 2010

The Metal element gives the Tiger its sharpness in action and speed of thought. With an inspiring assertiveness and competitive demeanor, they determine their goals and then do anything necessary to achieve them.

The Tiger and Morning Tears

Morning Tears and all its volunteers are more than ready to welcome and take on the traits of the Tiger. As brave warriors we are willing to take on the challenges that 2010 will undoubtedly bring: strategic plans to finance our numerous projects; courage to take on new challenges; protective action to build resilience in the Morning Tears children and the dignity needed to keep true to our principles.

Morning Tears wishes all of its faithful readers, supporters, donors, and volunteers a glorious 2010!



What's up in morning tears? (.../...)

- Morning Tears and children of convicts was the lead article in the summer edition of the internal magazine of the Chinese ministry of civil affairs. The magazine is distributed to everybody involved in civil affairs in China in all provinces and at all levels. The article boosted the popularity of Morning Tears with the Chinese authorities. The Morning Tears children are now back on the national agenda!



- Morning Tears received a golden medal for international friendship from the Chinese authorities. The medal was given in the framework of the celebration of 60 years of the People's Republic of China. It is a big honor the medal has been passed on to the real morning tears warriors. Morning Tears is delighted that we receive now full recognition from the Chinese authorities.

Psychological Insights

By: Koen Sevenants

Since prison visits are essential in the healing process of children, we believe it is crucial that we have a closer look at what the phases of healing are in children who have experienced a trauma.

The phases of healing

Understanding the phases of healing can help caregivers to provide the right assistance on the right time to children. In general terms the healing process consists of three stages. In each of these stages the child will have specific behaviors and needs, and he/she should complete certain 'tasks' for healing to occur.

The first phase is the phase of crisis response. There are two types of behaviors possible in this phase. A first type is overreacting: children show extreme distress and disruption. The second type is characterized extreme passivity and numbness. Children show either overreaction or passivity. During this phase the mind and body of the children are very tense and they are hyper alert for danger. Children in this phase need an environment and caregivers that provide a feeling of safety. Before the children can enter the second phase, they must regain a certain feeling of safety and reestablish normal eating and sleeping patterns. This phase normally can take some weeks and up to two months.

Many caregivers consider the healing process completed when the child feels safe again and starts to be relaxed. But this is definitely not the case. Recovery is far from complete. The child merely finished the first phase and he/she is ready to enter the second phase.

In the second phase the child starts the battle with memories and intrusive images. In this phase children must find a way to acknowledge that the trauma really happened and that it will have an impact on their lives. This task is a big struggle for the children. The wish to forget is exactly the opposite of the unwanted memories, images and feeling that the child is experiencing. The child must confront the traumatic event. This is a lot of pain and anger involved for the children. In this phase the child can suffer a lot from nightmares. It is also now that the child struggles with questions like 'why me?' and 'how could this happen?' The most important task of the child in this phase is that the child needs to find a way to integrate the story of the trauma in the story of his/her life. Before the traumatic event the child had the story of his/her life implicitly in his/her head. Now, he/she needs to review his/her story and the traumatic event will need to be part of it. Some children do this review of life story in words, but most of them do not. As the child makes progress in integrating the traumatic event in her life story, he/she will become more capable of making reference to the traumatic event. The child will become better in dealing with elements that can provoke retraumatization experiences. The length of this phase can vary from four months to some years.

The third phase is one in which engagement in ordinary life takes place. Energy comes back, and the trauma stops to be at the center of the life of the child. The child discovers in this phase that his/her life story has changed by the trauma, but life does not end.

Few children go smoothly from phase one to two and then to three. Flashbacks, nightmares or other retraumatization experiences can mean a serious setback. Some children need to go through the three stages a number of times before they find suitable solutions for the problems in their inner world. Every healing process will see ups and downs.

Some children have delayed reaction to the traumatic event. This is referred to as the 'sleeper effect'. Sudden, delayed symptoms of trauma can be triggered by anniversaries or other obvious sources of retraumatization, but also by subtle things of which the child is not aware of the connection anymore. Delayed responses to trauma can occur within the first year following the trauma or many years later.

News from the World (../..)

Weller Health Education Center announces honorees for Outstanding Friend to Kids Awards

The Program for Women and Families will be honored with the outstanding organization award for the program "Moments of Magical Storytelling" or "MOMS." This program records the voices of incarcerated mothers reading bedtime stories so these recordings can be played for their children at home.

Source: Express-Times, August 2009, http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/easton/index.ssf/2009/08/weller_health_education_center.html



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Beneficiary: Guo Zhi Hong (郭志弘)
BIC/SWIFT: BKCHCNBJ110

morning tears rebuilds the world for children who have lost their own world.

morning tears rebuilds the world for children who have suffered or are suffering heavy emotional pain.

We focus particularly on:

- children whose parents are in prison;
- children whose parents have been sentenced to death;
- children who have been abused or neglected;
- orphans;
- children who haven't been registered at birth, and thus have no rights;
- street children.

morning tears has been operating since 1999 on an informal basis without legal structure. However, in March 2005 **morning tears** became a formal non-profit organization registered under Belgian Law. Currently, **morning tears** has offices in Belgium, Spain and China.

morning tears is run entirely by volunteers. These volunteers are mostly professionals from the social sector or development aid workers, although we also have journalists and engineers in our group.

The running costs of **morning tears** are kept very low, so that donations can go almost entirely to the children in need.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

WWW.MORNINGTEARS.ORG

News from the World (./..)

Compiled By: Mirjam Lambooj

\$250,000 state grant to aid children of incarcerated parents

The Tennessee Department of Correction is presenting a \$250,000 grant to Big Brothers Big Sisters to help children of incarcerated parents.

Source: Associated Press, September 2009, <http://www.whnt.com/news/sns-bc-tn-helpingkids,0.186239.story>

Call to respect child welfare before imprisoning parents

Children's rights should be considered before their parents receive custodial sentences, according to Scotland's children's commissioner.

Source: Dominique Brady (Children & Young People Now), August 2009, <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/ByDiscipline/Social-Care/928171/Call-respect-child-welfare-imprisoning-parents/>

Program launched to help jailed mums

Aboriginal mothers incarcerated at Wellington Correctional Centre are set to receive support on building family relationships.

Source: Sharon Toynton (Wellington Times), August 2009,

<http://www.wellingtontimes.com.au/news/local/news/general/program-launched-to-help-jailed-mums/1603845.aspx>