

East Asia insight

OMF INTERNATIONAL FALL 2005

Short-term trip, long-term impact

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Is it possible for short-term missionaries to make a lasting impact in reaching an unreached people group? Is there any way the impact of missions on the short-termer can last longer than the wet ink on his or her visa stamp? I believe the answer to both questions is "Yes!" But it requires planning and commitment.

At OMF, our Serve Asia workers make a lasting impact by adhering to a key principle: Ministry opportunities are (1) aligned with our organization's vision and mission; and (2) in partnership with our workers on the field. Sometimes it furthers a team's efforts through evangelism. Sometimes it builds awareness and presence in a community through of service.

While short-term workers cannot replace those who invest in learning a language and culture and building long-lasting relationships, they can often do more than we assume. For example, several of our ethnographic research teams (in partnership with Caleb Project) have provided key information for entering and understanding an unreached people group. Team members have also become strong advocates and mobilizers for that unreached people group, which is vital to reaching such groups.

SURPRISED BY CHINA by Chad Berry

Sheila* was tired. The six-week Serve Asia trip was nearing its conclusion and she and her teammates were ready to go home.

But there they were, in a hot, dusty town in central China. The team was to spend a week teaching English at a nearby high school. After her first session with the students, Sheila decided it was going to be a long week.

"Looking at the 25 students in my class that first day, I really felt nothing for them," Sheila recalls. "They didn't seem to understand much of what we said, and there was nothing warm or inviting in their countenance."

Thankfully, that soon changed. By Thursday, just four days later, she had fallen in love with those 25 students.

She realized this while lying on her bed one

Seeing long-term impact in the lives of short-term workers begins with selection and training. When people contact us we assume God has them on a journey. The goal of our pre-field training is not limited to equipping workers to enter cultures and work well with teammates. We also further their understanding of God's heart for the nations—and their role in that. It may be as a long-term worker, or it may involve other key avenues of service—as a mobilizer, intercessor, sender or "welcomer" (working with unreached peoples in the worker's home country).

Long-term impact also involves helping short-term workers integrate their experiences into "real" life once they return. Debriefing after the trip is designed to further the personal processing that short-term workers go through. But debriefing is only the beginning. We seek to follow up each Serve alumnus to the point that they can make a prayerful and intentional decision about his or her role in God's plan for the nations—at least for the next few years. If we can get each person to that point, short-term trips can make a lasting impact for God's glory in the workers' lives, as well as among East Asia's unreached peoples.

afternoon. As she rested, the faces of the children came to her mind. Her team had been told that they might not be able to openly share the gospel with the students. The thought that these students may never hear the message of God's love broke Sheila's heart.

"I began to pray fervently that the Lord would send someone to them to share the good news of God's love and redemption with them," says Sheila. "I can say at that moment, my heart connected with the longings of God's heart for these precious children to know him."

Later that night, the team was told they could share the gospel the next day. The next morning, Sheila watched one of her teammates give a powerful gospel presentation to the students. Sheila's prayers were answered.

"I will never forget those kids and my life





I will never forget those kids and my life will never be the same...

will never be the same because of knowing them and catching a glimpse of God's heart for them," says Sheila.

Sheila and her team spent the chunk of their summer a short-term mission trip through OMP's Serve Asia program. They went as language students with the goal of building relationships and sharing Christ with those they met.

They also spent time teaching English. Today in China, college students are required to achieve a certain proficiency in English before graduating, thus making conversations with native English speakers like Sheila and her team a coveted moment for Chinese students.

But it was Sheila's interaction in another language that - like her love for the Chinese high school students - caught her by surprise. During pre-field training, participants were asked to write down "three burning questions" they wanted answered during their trip. One of Sheila's was, "Is there a way God could use a short-term team of Spanish speakers in China?"

She had spent the last five years building relationships with Hispanics in her town and had developed a desire to see God use them to reach the nations and, specifically, Asia. After a week in China, she discovered a nearby "Spanish Corner" that met every Saturday.

Sheila attended the weekly event and met

five Chinese students who were Spanish majors. She developed a friendship with one of the students and met the couple who was hosting the Spanish Corner. It turns out that they, too, were Christians trying to make an impact. Sheila's arrival was a breath of fresh air to the couple.

"There really aren't many other Spanish-speaking Christians there, so God used me to bring encouragement and comfort, speaking to them in their heart language and sharing with them my vision of bringing a short-term team of Spanish speakers to China" says Sheila.

Today, Sheila's missions involvement continues in Oaxaca, Mexico, where she's a missionary at a children's home and outreach center. But she's not forgotten East Asia. She hopes her experience in China will spill over to those she ministers to in Mexico. She credits the Serve Asia program for much of that mindset.

"It's a program that is interested not only in reaching Asia, but also in reaching you as an individual," she says. "They never put service before relationships...I learned so much during my pre-field training weekend that I've been able to take components of the program and implement them here at our mission in Mexico."

Now as she lives in Mexico, Sheila hopes to not only see children come to Christ, but also to mobilize them to get involved in reaching the nations for Christ.

"I want the seed of missions to be planted in their hearts at a young age," says Sheila. "I truly believe that God would have some of them go to China and other parts of Asia to bring him glory!" ■

** Names have been changed to protect identities.*

PROFILE OF A SERVE ASIA COUPLE: JOE AND SUE JOHNSON*

Joe and Sue Johnson have gone on Serve Asia trips the past two summers via a seminary partnership team. Though they received academic credit for one of the trips, the couple gained more than just another grade. They gained a passionate heart for the Muslim people group they served.

Age: 30 (both)

Where from: Cayman Islands

Serve Asia team: Seminary partnership team from Columbia International University

Where serve: Southeast Asia

What did you do? (Joe) "Ethnographic research—asking questions, learning about the people and the culture... We went in there with a long-term view to plant an indigenous church

among the people. That's still the goal and the ultimate dream of this team, to have an indigenous church planted there, capable of propagating itself and taking the gospel of Christ to the surrounding areas."

Describe the people group you worked with: (Sue) "They were very curious about us. A lot of them wanted us to join them in their activities. They're very peaceful people, unconcerned that we weren't Muslims." "The pace of life is much simpler than we're used to over here. Time is not very critical. You start when people get there."

How did you see God at work during your trip? (Joe) "The man of the house was staying in wasn't there all the time. But we had



one deep spiritual discussion. Although he seemed to be devout, he said that basically at the end of time, deeds were going to be weighed and if our good deeds exceeded our bad deeds, then you go to paradise. In our discussion, there seemed to be some openness. He seemed to be open to the fact that people other than Muslims could go to paradise to be with God. We thought that was fairly significant."

(Sue) "When we had to leave after eight days, the women of the village were weeping and crying and hugging the girls on our team and the guys were very somber. This people group is a fairly unemotional people, yet they were openly mourning our departure. It wasn't just a show they were putting on. They had really come to appreciate, and, it seemed, love us. The goodbyes were so long we nearly missed our boat. In a short amount of time, we had connected with people from a dramatically different background."

How was God at work among your team? (Sue) "Prior to going, the people group was a name, maybe a few faces in photographs, a stat sheet. On our first trip and it was reinforced on the second trip, we basically fell in love with the people. It gave us a passion to pray for them and see them as a whole people come to Christ."

What are some of the benefits of a seminary partnership team? (Joe) "There seem to be a lot of people in seminary that God has prepared to serve long-term, but sometimes those people don't know exactly where to go. By mission organizations partnering with seminaries, it gives mission organizations ready access to people awaiting God's call."

"It's a win-win situation for everybody. The organization gets exposure. The field side gets to network with potential future long-termers. If these partnerships are run well, they can be a benefit to everybody involved and, ultimately, God's name is glorified."

What were the results of the trip? (Joe) "The key short-term things we wanted to happen were for the awareness of the people group and prayer support for the people group to be increased. All the research was geared towards understanding the people and, in the long-term, creating gospel presentation tools that would be culturally appropriate. We made great progress towards meeting both short and long-term goals."

"The whole team fell in love with the people we met. At a minimum, team members are going to be praying for the people group in the future, possibly mobilizing for teams to this group and maybe even going over there long-term."

"Everything God wanted to happen happened. The things that didn't happen were the things that we wanted but really weren't God's timing yet."

Until this past summer, the people group the Johnsons worked among had less than 50 known believers among them. In recent months, God has done an amazing work and there are now more than 100 believers. The couple is currently praying about serving long-term among this Southeast Asian Muslim group. ■

*Names have been changed to protect identities

GOD AT WORK IN EAST ASIA

First Chinese to lead OMF International



The tenth general director of OMF International (formerly the China Inland Mission) will be Dr. Patrick Fung. Dr. Fung is the first Asian to lead the mission in its 140 year history. Dr. Fung (46) became a Christian while a medical student in Australia. He served first as a doctor in Hong Kong and was admitted to the Royal College of Physicians in the UK as well as the HK Academy of Medicine. He later received an MA in missiology from Fuller Seminary. Patrick and his wife Jennie, a consultant gynecologist, joined OMF in 1989, serving first in a Muslim context. In 1996 Patrick was appointed Director of OMF Hong Kong, and in 2001 became the International Director for Mobilization, based in Singapore. He succeeds the Rev. Dr. David Harley, who has served as general director since 2001. The Fungs have two children, Elaine (13) and Samuel (6).

Baptisms in Taiwan

Praise God for two women and three girls who were baptized in late September in Taiwan. God has transformed the lives of these five new believers, and they are boldly sharing their faith with family members and friends. Meng and her 10-year-old daughter are among the five that were baptized. Meng ran a shop selling pagan religious items, but became convinced that selling those things was not pleasing to God, and has thrown them away. In a worship service in her shop she prayed that her shop and life would be a light to bring people to faith in Christ.

New church plant in Thailand

Thank God for breakthroughs, despite severe spiritual warfare, in a church-planting effort in northern Thailand. In August five new believers were baptized, and are growing in their new faith. There are four more adults waiting to be baptized.

Krung villagers come to Christ

In June in Cambodia ten young Krung villagers prayed to receive Christ. They were baptized in August along with five others who had been attending a local church for some time. These new believers have now been meeting several times a week for prayer and worship.



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