

Lumos Travel Award: Final Paper  
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This summer I spent 6 weeks volunteering and studying Chinese in China. Every morning I would have my 4-hour Chinese lesson and then I would go to volunteer in the afternoons. I volunteered at a school for autistic children on Tuesday and Thursday and at a home for the elderly on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I wanted to volunteer at two places so I could help as many people as possible. It particularly made me happy to be able to help both the young and old in China.

At the autistic school, I observed therapy sessions and made suggestions, assisted in music class, and got to know both the parent and child in art class.



In China the mentally and physically disabled are looked down on. Disabled children are still being abandoned all the time. Even girls are still being abandoned who have no issues at all. So the majority of children at the autistic school were boys and I did not even notice this fact until closer to the end of my time in China. The Chinese culture is so stuck on being educated, smart and living luxuriously. Through interacting with the mentally challenged and their families, I was able to see how difficult it was for both the parents and children. Some parents or grandparents had no patience during class sessions and this usually led to screaming and hitting their child. They think that through discipline they can somehow cure their disabled child. Unfortunately this will never be the case. Usually the child did not know what he/she was even doing “wrong.” The worst part is that the child was usually not doing anything wrong. They were just struggling with their disability and it was hard for the family and teachers to understand. It was hard to see and I always tried my best to show care and encouragement during those times. Even though I am not an expert on mentally disabled children I was able to view them as an individual and treat them all equally which is hard for some Chinese people to grasp. Some children were obviously physically abused and those usually did not attend the school for long. I had a great appreciation for the parents who were willing to take care of their disabled child, have patience and not abandon them.

At the elderly home I fed some who could not eat on their own, took others on walks in their wheelchairs and just gave them company.



The home that I volunteered at housed mentally and physically disabled elderly. There are 2 to 3 people in each bedroom and the quality of the home is not good. It is a relatively small elderly home with 300 people living there. There is little to no privacy and nothing is built to accommodate the physically disabled. The staff at the home was very nice and caring towards the elderly but the people on the outside would not have much sympathy. When I was there the routine was basically the same every day and there were not many visitors. I strongly believe that elderly people deserve to be taken care of and live in a good environment. They have most likely gone through a lot in life and have taken care of others. I feel like they deserve to be taken care of in return.

After these summer experiences I hope to one day open an elderly home in China. I even told some of the elderly that when I open my own elderly home they can move to mine. It made them so happy. I truly want to work towards that goal. In between then, I want to continue working on my Chinese, teach English to children in China, eventually get my graduate degree and make a lot of connections on the way.

It is hard to summarize my trip and I could go on for days. I had to face some challenges that I would never have to face in the United States. I also had to deal with a language barrier and some days were harder than others. Even though I was constantly studying Chinese it was always a challenge to communicate. My mind, body and soul was tired at the end of each day and I knew I had to do it all again the next. However it was through overcoming these challenges and helping these people that I was able to discover more about myself and my passion.