

Fostering orphaned and disabled children in China

A 10-year review of foster care
May 2009

Foreword

The family unit is arguably the most vital component of society.

It is an environment in which personal care, attention to individual needs and emotional securities are provided. In the family, children can be properly nurtured to develop into healthy and responsible members of society. As the future of every society lies with children, their interests should be promoted and safeguarded in every way possible and as such, parents need to acquire the skills essential to allow children a safe and happy beginning to the journey of life. The value of our work of developing foster care as an alternative to institutional care can only be measured by the positive change of orphaned and disabled children's lives, and in their ability to live full lives as independent adults within their respective communities.

For a developed country to establish a successful child welfare service there is a need for a range of services that includes adoption, foster care, residential care, day care and other services to meet the needs of the children in their care.

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Foster care is both a very ordinary activity and an extraordinary undertaking. As an instrument of social policy in China, foster care offers a long-term alternative to institutional care for orphaned and disabled children, who are amongst the most disadvantaged groups in China.

In recent years, critics of services for children in care have tended to highlight the deficiencies of residential rather than foster care and, following the writings of a number of distinguished authors including John Bowlby and Erving Goffman, most commentators have concluded that residential institutions are not an ideal environment in which to care for children.

It is alleged that institutions sometimes fail to achieve desired changes in behaviour and are probably more expensive. Following research and evidence related to foster care shows that the child's physical, emotional and social development is greatly increased when placed in a loving family with a good level of attachment.

Perhaps the most important lesson China can see from the west regarding foster care is from the many mistakes that were made in western countries such as the UK over the last thirty years. So in bringing this experience of foster care to China, it is important to understand how the social policy of western countries failed the children in their care. It is also crucially important to make sure these mistakes are not replicated in China.

Sino-British foster care cooperation

There has been substantial progress in China's social welfare system reform between 1998 and 2008.

The establishment of social policies such as 'Integrating Social Services into Society' and 'Small Government, Big Society' reflects rapid progress, and social welfare in China has achieved unprecedented development in both system implementation and the level of professional service.

In the field of child welfare, the development of foster care has provided an important alternative to the traditional institutional care of disabled and orphaned children. By working with scientific, professional, social and systematic development, this can be viewed as a significant breakthrough.

Promoting foster care development for the past decade, 'Care for Children' has developed and enjoyed a strong partnership with China's child welfare department. Care for Children is honoured to have had the opportunity to be involved with the foster care training project since its inception. The many facets of training include foster care system construction, staff and foster parent training, and physical rehabilitation that has played a key role in the development of the national foster care project.

In September 1998, Care for Children (at the time funded by the UK's Department for International Development), partnered with the Shanghai Social Welfare Centre under the authority of the Shanghai Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau, to begin the implementation of long-term foster care to disabled and orphaned children.

The project was dedicated to moving children from the welfare institution into the care of local families, believing the natural warmth, love and care of a family would improve their standard of living. Under such conditions, foster children will stay and grow in their foster homes until the maturation of their independence (Glover, 2006).

The Sino-British foster care project in Shanghai was the first to utilise international experience to implement professional standards of foster care for disabled and orphaned children in China. After more than 4 years of partnership from both sides,

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more than 400 disabled and/or orphaned children were successfully placed into foster families across 16 different districts of Shanghai. In the year 2000, equipped with experience gained from the Shanghai project, Care for Children expanded their training project into Chengdu, Kunming, Yinchuan in Western and Southern China, working in direct partnership with the local authorities.

On 17th June 2003, at the invitation of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, Care for Children and its present partner, the China Social Work Association formally signed a co-operation agreement entitled: 'Foster Care Training Project for Disabled and Orphaned Children in Central and Western China', promoting foster care in 15 provincial level child welfare authorities. In July 2007, continuing the successful co-operation, both sides agreed to an extension of the agreement and expanded from 15 to 30 project sites.

The devastating earthquake of May 12th in Sichuan province led to the beginning of 8 new project sites for the Sichuan region. At the time of writing (May 2009), Care for Children works in 38 project sites in 26 provinces and autonomous regions across China.

Care for Children's primary focus is to 'strategically train people to empower children's lives'. Over the past decade this has been achieved by a variety of regional and local training workshops, international study visits, national and international Master Degree sponsorships and national conferences.

By utilising experience and advanced international concepts, Care for Children and the China Social Work Association worked together to establish a system that worked well in China. In year 2000 and 2002 Care for Children successfully hosted two national foster care forums in Shanghai, which played a major role in the early development of foster care in China. Since then Care for Children worked with the East China Normal University to provide training for foster care staff, to help develop professional practice for the project.

From the launch of the National Foster Care Project (2003), the work of Care for Children has steadily developed into a comprehensive training system, covering many aspects of child development and foster care that has benefited from an increasing number of projects sites. This system consists of:

1. National conference
2. Regional training course
3. On-site coaching and training
4. Professional training seminars and symposia
5. International study trips

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6. Post-graduate studies on child welfare in the UK

In 2003 and 2006, Care for Children and the China Social Work Association successfully hosted two national forums on foster care. This was followed by two national project conferences involving all project sites in 2005 and 2007.

By the end of 2008, staff from 220 child welfare institutions across China had received training in the area of substitute family placement (foster care).

The training has successfully promoted the professional and scientific development of foster care across China, leading to thousands of disabled and orphaned children living in foster families as an alternative to institutional care. The quality of care provided by the foster families has enabled the foster children to make significant development in the areas of health, personality development and emotional and social interaction {(Foster care management practices) research group, 2003}.

The impact of long-term foster care on the physical and mental development of disabled and orphaned children

Care for Children believes that families are probably the most effective and economical place to nurture children. Only within a family environment will children unlock their emotions and maximise their true potential. As an important alternative to residential care, foster care offer more to some children, shifting the focus to the children themselves.

Foster care is equipped to satisfy the all-around needs of the development of a child; not only safeguarding the child's basic livelihood but also help to promote comprehensive development. It realises the child's physical and mental health development across the board, and takes into account the child's right of subsistence, development and social participation (XianJin Wang, 2007). Research and experience have proved time and again that foster care positively influences children's development.

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i. Substantial improvement in children's physical health

The majority of foster children are orphaned as a result of their birth parents abandoning them as newborns. At the initial stage of foster care it is usually their health that is most

vulnerable. However, after entering a foster family, and under the careful attention of their foster parents, there are usually clear improvements in the health of these foster children. Fewer illnesses are reported, they grow taller and they start to gain weight. In addition, a home environment provides these children with a larger living space and better platform to develop. There is more freedom for activities, and the children interact with their new family and experience much more.

This all represents excellent conditions for the healthy, intellectual development and physical rehabilitation of disabled and orphaned children (Pinjun Yin, 2002).

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Some child welfare institutions have now set up foster care and physical rehabilitation training stations in areas with a high concentration of foster families, and assign professional staff to these stations to provide guidance and support. These stations directly provide services such as physical rehabilitation and special education, as well as professional guidance for foster parents so that interventions can be continued at home, achieving a more desirable outcome. For instance, continued physical rehabilitation has helped to produce remarkable improvements in the conditions of the disabled children.

ii. Positive impact on children's social emotional development

In institutions, the ratio of caregivers to children is one to many, and workers often have a 3-shift system, meaning a child is unlikely to have a fixed caregiver (Juping Zhou, 2007). As a result there is a lack of personal attention and social stimulation. This, coupled with the experience of being abandoned by their biological parents, contributes to the formation of attachment disorder and can produce negative effects on their moral.

In addition, they also often lack a sense of security, trust and empathy, which can cause psychological and behaviour disorders. This includes anxiety, bad tempers, impulsive and violent behaviour, disengagement, poor interpersonal relationships, hyperactivity, attention deficit, cognitive defects as well as diet issues (Howe, 2005).

Lacking self-confidence and self-esteem, many children living in institutions consider themselves unlovable, or not worth loving; they lack self-understanding, do not realise their strength and weaknesses, and are at a loss for the future. They often develop eccentricity, loneliness, selfishness and suspiciousness, and find it difficult to integrate into society.

In comparison, long-term foster care provides orphaned children a stable home; they have fixed foster parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents and other family members. The increase in the amount of care from one caregiver to several children in institutions, to one child to several caregivers in a family, is dramatic! This allows the child to receive more

sensitive and meticulous care, satisfying the physiological and emotional needs a growing child craves.

Meeting children's needs through family-based care relays the following messages to them: *'I am safe, I am important, my foster family cares about me, I am lovable and valuable, and others are trustworthy.'* This greatly enhances the child's sense of security, helping them to learn to trust, to regulate and control their behaviour and emotions, as the unconditional acceptance of the foster family strengthens the child's self-esteem, enabling him or her to face up to his or her strengths and weaknesses, and helping them to develop a positive sense of identity.

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With good care from their foster parents, foster children will develop a strong sense of belonging to the family, feeling that they cannot be separated from it. This is especially important to children who have already experienced the loss of their parents.

Sensitive care and the unconditional acceptance by foster parents provides a place of security for disabled and orphaned children and helps them develop a safe level of attachment (Schofield and Beek, 2004). Additionally the warm, intimate and lasting relationship formed will give both sides a sense of satisfaction and joy, which is the basic element of psychological health (Bowlby, 1953). As the basis of foster care is to encourage children to develop attachment to their foster parents, the core content of foster care assessment is to determine whether such close relationship exists (Schofield and Beek, 2006).

Foster care provides a substitute parentage relationship, this would help the formation of attachment between the disabled and orphaned children with their new caregiver.

Care for Children is convinced that foster care helps children to develop attachment by forming a lasting substitute parentage relationship with their foster parents. The meticulous care provided by foster parents helps to make up for any missing 'maternal love' they will have suffered, and helps heal their spiritual wounds. This promotes their psychological development, strengthens their sense of security and resilience, and lays a solid foundation for them to take on new challenges in the future.

iii. Healthy development of children's social adaptation

Adaptive behaviour refers to an independence in dealing with daily life, and the ability to undertake social responsibility to a level anticipated relative to age and the socio-cultural background of the individual, and also refers to one's effectiveness in adapting to the natural and social environment (Zhixian Zhu, 1989).

A child's ability to adapt, happens through interactions with others, therefore children should live in an open environment where they can interact, not by isolating them from society (Fanlin Zeng & Fei Zan, 2001).

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The family is a place where we can care for each other, and practice consideration for each other. Often children in institution have relative isolation from society, this causes difficulties for children to learn how to become normal members of society. For example, how does a little boy learn to be a father if he does not have one as a role model?

Some foster children are the only child in their new family, and this usually means he or she will receive a lot of attention and care. As a result of this many-to-one relationship, foster children have more opportunities to interact with society, therefore helping them to understand and practice in a natural manner how to become a normal member of society (Lijuan Cui & Zhiyong Yang, 2002). A research study by Fanlin Zeng and Fei Zan (2001) compared behaviour by rating scores between 70 foster children and 31 children living in institutions in Shanghai. The results showed that foster care positively influenced the development of adaptive ability, and was more successful when placing younger children.

Another study into adaptive behaviour (Yunxia Jin et al, 2001) that looked at Beijing's rural foster children also showed that children in rural foster families score higher on the adaptive behaviour scale, particularly on cognitive scores. At the same time, foster care also strengthened children's ability to manage daily activities independently, cultivating their personal interest in life. A study by Yingfang Yao and Peijuan Zhang (2009), compared average intelligence between foster children and children living in institutions, and found the former group to be superior in areas such as reflex development, ability to respond to outside stimuli, social interaction skills, adaptation ability and language development.

Zhifang Cao et al (2004) evaluated the neuropsychological development of children living in institutions and in foster families and concluded that infants and young children in foster care showed significant superiority in the development of gross motor skills, fine motor skills, adaptive capacity, language and social behaviour. This clearly shows that foster care is more conducive to the neuropsychological development of children. The authors urge the continual growth and development of foster care so that more disabled and orphaned children can be placed into families, returning them into normal society.

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Foster families act as a bridge in bringing more opportunities for social contact, strengthening exchanges with normal peers, and developing

self-care ability for disabled and orphaned children, acting as a spring-board to integrate children into society (Fanlin Zeng & Fei Zan, 2001).

iv. Significant improvement on children's social interaction skills

A research study (Fenlin Zhen & Fei Zan, 2001) on social interactions, comparing foster children and children living in institutions analysed 3 variables: physical abilities, social affairs and academic performance in school. It found that foster children scored higher in all 3 categories. They scored considerably higher in social affairs and academic performance and achieved a lower score when numbers of psychological problems encountered were analysed. It is clear foster care promotes the development of social relations and reduces psychological and behaviour problems of disabled and orphaned children. Yanbing Wang et al (2006) pointed out that, after placement into foster families, disabled and orphaned children have a broader scope for social interaction, relations with the foster families become more affectionate and there is growing attachment with their foster parents, showing more desire to socialise with their peer group, and generally get along well and are popular with others.

At the beginning of a placement, foster children will often experience problems such as being timid, hiding their innermost feelings, disengaging and may find it hard to initiate interactions with others. After living in a family, foster parents generally report improvements on these issues. Children become livelier and can take the initiative to communicate with neighbours and family members, showing strong attachment and trust towards their foster parents (Fengmei Yang & Qian Yang, 2007). Pingjun Yin (2002) has also found in their report that the vast majority of foster children have excellent behaviour, are polite, generous, friendly and generally get along well with others. In addition they have better self-awareness, are conscious of other people and understand the act of sharing. Foster care has provided disabled and orphaned children with a normal family environment, expanding the scope of the child's social interaction, strengthened the children's ability to interact normally. These are vital conditions in which the child develops in a healthy manner and integrates with society.

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Foster care and its impact on the transformation of foster families

In addition to effectively promoting the healthy development of disabled and orphaned children, foster care also positively impacts foster families.

Foster children provide joy, a sense of new life, and also enrich the emotional life of the family. Foster parents generally agreed that there are varying degrees of changes within the family after they began to foster children. A vast majority of foster mothers believe the arrival of the foster children

has brought harmony to the family and many think that their relationship with the neighbourhood and community has been enhanced, with some reporting that their husbands spend more time at home, significantly reducing the gambling and drinking behaviour.

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Almost always, foster mothers feel that all family members are delighted to help care for the foster child, and that the family becomes happier as a result. Foster mothers generally agreed that their life had been lit up and filled with happiness after the arrival of their foster child (Fengmei Yang & Qian Yang, 2007). In addition, some foster parents reflect that since participating in providing foster care, they have themselves discovered renewed self-identity due to the feeling that the child needs them. Also some parents have reported that since becoming foster parents, they have won the respect of the community, giving them a strong sense of accomplishment (Luping Wu et al, 2005).

At the same time, foster care also inspires a lot of people and raises the sense of social responsibility in society and the country at large, enabling people to pay more attention to the welfare of children.

As suggested by Robert Glover of Care for Children, foster care effectively creates harmonious families, contributing hugely to the creation of a harmonious society.

Foster care and the impact on welfare institutions.

Social welfare institutions are a valuable resource for the local community. They offer: reception into care, respite care, long-term care, training, rehabilitation, support to families, and support to foster families.

Empirical studies have shown that foster care can meet the emotional needs and promote all-round development of disabled and orphaned children. Not only is foster care in line with the general approach of 'integrating social service into society', but it is also conducive to the operations of the child welfare institutions by alleviating some of the financial burden of the government (Xianjin Wang, 2007)

i. Foster care and the functional transformation of welfare institution.

At the national foster care seminar (2003), Vice Minister Civil Affairs, Baoku Li, stated: 'at this stage, the functions of child welfare institutions need to be adjusted by drawing on the experiences of foreign countries and combining it with China's national condition. From a development point of view, child welfare institutions should implement the following 6 functions:

1. To become the region's information management centre on the plight of children in that region and provide basic information of its services by carrying out basic data collection and collation.
2. To become a centre for professional skills training for those who are working with children in plight.
3. To develop as a community rehabilitation centre and provide rehabilitation services to disabled children.
4. To become and act as a temporary shelter and provide care to those already in the institution and also those who are recently orphaned and abandoned.
5. To become a foster care service and management centre.
6. To become a service centre for technical support to families with children with special needs.

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Through the above changes, child welfare institutions are expanded by becoming an integrated community-based child welfare resource centre.

For a long time, the focus of child welfare institutions has been on providing long-term care to orphaned and abandoned children. But with the development of foster care, many more children have the opportunity of a family in community.

The pressure on child welfare institutions has been reduced as a result and they are now able to offer quality scaled down residential care and assume supervision and provide training to support foster parents, provide technical support to families who are caring for the disabled. The focal point of its services has shifted from caring for the children's basic livelihood to improving the quality of life and protecting the legitimate rights of these children. For this reason, the development of foster care has helped ease the strain on the financial resources and presents an opportunity to the child welfare institutions to re-organise, providing a platform for its function to develop and make innovative changes that focus on the community.

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ii. Foster care conserves human and material resources and improves the quality and effectiveness of service

In recent years, child welfare institutions are taking in an increasing number of children, with the majority suffering from various degrees of disability.

If in accordance to the traditional method of institutional care, the staffing and expenses of the institution will continue to grow. Foster care remains to be cost effective while offering the child a place in society. Staffing and expenses required to implement foster care is significantly lower than that of providing institutional care {(Foster care management practices) research group, 2003; Liwei Feng, Kelin Zhang, 2003}. An empirical study by Luping Wu et al (2005) verified the above observation, stating that the expenditure involved in foster care is roughly half the cost of institutional care, and is therefore considerably easing the financial burden on the government. More children can be taken care of without an increase in funding as a result (Yanbing Wang et al, 2006).

Secondly, due to the fact that more disabled and orphaned children are being placed into families, children who remain in institutions naturally have more time and space for activities such as rehabilitation, education and play, and therefore lead a fuller life (Liwei Feng & Kelin Zhang, 2003). In addition, in order to provide special education and rehabilitation services to those fostered into families, some children welfare institutions utilise existing community resources to build education and rehabilitation centres among areas of concentrated foster

families. The training of foster parents by a social welfare institution's own professionals has greatly improved the efficiency and effectiveness of rehabilitation for instance {(Foster care management practices) research group, 2003}.

iii. Foster care is in line with the direction of sustainable development of child welfare

Child welfare institutions across the country, especially those in the bigger cities, have seen their numbers of children soar and with funding and resources constraints, have been unable to meet the needs of the children {(Foster care management practices) research group, 2003}. Foster care is much more cost-effective and without a substantial increase in funding, many more disabled and orphaned children can be looked after. Therefore foster care alleviates the resource tension facing child welfare institutions and promotes opportunity for sustainable development of child welfare.

iv. Foster care advocates the integration of the work of child welfare into society

The core objective of China's social policy reform has been to integrate the work of social welfare into society.

This includes the process of integrating management methods, funding sources, service-providing teams and service-beneficiary groups into society. More specific to the field of child welfare, traditional institutional care requires the government and child welfare institutions to take full responsibility on the welfare of disabled and orphaned children, with the government taking on the majority of the expenses involved, thereby restricting the development of the integration of child welfare into society at large (Xianjin Wang, 2007).

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However, after the implementation of the foster care programs, associating disabled and orphaned children with society was made possible. The development of foster care has allowed community resources to be fully exploited, mobilising the strengths of society into helping disabled and orphaned children; and increasing the number of children being looked after, regardless of the development of institutions, and truly integrating children into society by providing care in the family setting and ensuring the healthy, all-round development of disabled and orphaned children. Moreover, we can expect the development of a professional team through training and technical guidance provided to foster parents (Xianjin Wang, 2007).

In summary, the unremitting effort of Care for Children over the last decade has proved that foster care can completely transform the life of disabled

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and orphaned children. We have seen miracles in children with severe disabilities exceeding seemingly impossible expectations; their lives will never been the same again. They live in a family, go to school, study, and reach their full potential. At the same time, foster care is advantageous in easing the financial burden on the government, alleviating the tension faced by the child welfare institutions, thereby contributing to the development of integrating child welfare into society. In addition, foster care can bring joy and happiness to all members of foster families. This serves as an opportunity to display the spirit of love and social responsibility. It is apparent that foster care is a 'win-win' solution for the government, families and disadvantaged children, and has a broad prospect for development (Luping Wu et al, 2005).

However, foster care is still in the initial stage of development in China, but the initial research is very encouraging. Large-scale constructions of modern orphanages are still evident in some places. A number of people involved in child welfare still need to fully grasp the value of how to redirect these buildings' full potential to serve the community as laid out by Vice Minister Baoku Li.

Institutional care and its impact on child development

i. Attachment disorder

Attachment refers to the warm, intimate, emotional connection between infant and primary caregivers.

Attachment is a need in life and is the basis of mental health (Bowlby, 1953). The nature of the attachment plays a decisive role in the development of interpersonal relationships and personality in later life (Bowlby, 1944). Children with secure attachment, live and see the world with trust and security, show interest in their surrounding environment, are self-confident, have self-esteem, are independent, can effectively control their emotion and behaviour and also they are also more likely to understand and show empathy.

Attachment is formed through daily, one-to-one care between infant and the primary caregiver. The intimate physical contact and conscientious care provided by the caregiver are the essential elements in the child's physical and mental development and also because of this, a sense of trust and attachment develops.

Children with secure attachment live and see the world with trust and security

Research results indicate that the lack of early maternal love may lead to abnormal development of social skills. A research study by Lieberman and Pawl (1988) has identified three affected areas in children who have experienced early deprivation of maternal love: interpersonal relationship, impulsive behaviour and aggressive behaviour. Such children find it difficult to establish a relationship with others. With age, problems such as interpersonal conflicts, criminal behaviour, anger and attention deficit gradually surface.

ii. Hindrance on the normal development of the brain

The most important condition for brain development is an environment with rich stimulus. This stimulus will fundamentally change the structure and function of the brain (Huai Cheng & Xiaocheng Ji, 2001). Without the appropriate stimulus and interaction, the formation of a dense network of brain cells is not possible because many neurons and synapses are not activated, resulting in hypoplasia of the brain. This adversely impacts the growth and development of the child (Jidong Yu & Youli Wang, 2007). Early, appropriate experiences and environmental stimulus can promote the development of the central nervous system, and the experience of trauma adversely affects the normal development of the brain. Abnormal early experience translates to abnormal brain development, which then leads to changes in behaviour and the ability to interact (Yun Cao, 2002).

Children that lack the one-to-one attention and are deprived of the adequate social environment stimulation and the interaction with others. Children that do not receive enough hugs, touch, comfort, eye contact, dialogue and emotional exchanges results in the normal development of the brain being seriously impeded. At the same time, the development of certain abilities and skills is also obstructed (Pollak, 2003). Children in their early ages, raised in such a way will have serious emotional, intellectual and behavioural problems and the following cycle might occur: emotion neglect – lack of stimulation and interaction – obstructing the connection of the neurons and synapses – worsening the ability of the cerebral cortex to adjust – attachment obstacles – lack of empathy – difficulty in engaging in emotional exchanges – difficulty in socialising with others and an inclination to violence (Jidong Yu & Youli Wang, 2007).

Dr. Charles Neill conducted research on orphans living in large-scale institution in Romania and concluded, as a result of extreme deficiency of learning opportunities, the average IQ score of the children living in institutions as 40 points lower than their peers. Schore (2001) writes that the early traumatic experiences change the structure, and influenced the development of, the right side of the brain, thus affecting their social emotional development, emotional control, memory and ability to cope with pressure.

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As such, day-to-day family life is essential for the normal development of children and there are vital elements such as personal attention and the related environmental stimulation that only a family can provide and which cannot be replaced by institutions.

A family is probably the best place to raise children, and having a family life is essential to the normal development of a child. The following two stories serve as illustrations.

Emperor Fredrik II

Emperor Fredrik II of the Holy Roman Empire conducted an experiment to find out man's original language. He gathered a number of babies and employed wet nurses to physically care for the children, but they were strictly forbidden to talk, cuddle or sing to the babies.

The Emperor never found out about men's language – the children died out one after another without any apparent reason.

Xiao Qian

Xiao Qian is now 6 years old. He has been living with his foster family for more than 3 years. We went to visit Xiao Qian with a car provided by the orphanage. When he saw us, he thought we were going to take him away from his family and put him back into the institution. He stopped playing with his friend and picked up a wooden stick to try and drive us away. He said firmly and somewhat fiercely: 'this is my home, I do not want to leave my parents, my brothers and sisters and my dog. Nobody can take me away, I am not going anywhere'.

Having spent 3 years with the foster family, Xiao Qian has long regarded this sense of belonging to the family. He loves his foster father and mother and is inseparable from them. Xiao Qian lives with his family in simple conditions, but was clearly content and belonged to a strong network of friends in his village. His identity was strong and he had found his place in society.

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Concluding remarks

All orphaned and disabled children originate from a family and a family is the best option for most children.

As the former Vice Minister of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Mr. Yan Ming Fu said: 'for one hundred years we have cared for orphans in institutions. It is clear from the success of the Shanghai foster care project that from today we should develop foster care as a positive option to institutions'.

Long-term foster care gives orphaned and disabled children a permanent home and acts as a security base, allowing them to enjoy renewed family life.

Care for Children looks forward to continuing its partnership with the China Social Work Association to improve the quality of life for disabled and orphaned children through continuing the promotion of long-term foster care in the National Foster Care Project.

We often measure the success of foster care from the breakdown rate (the percentage of children that breakdown from their families). In the west, many have worked hard to reduce this breakdown rate to under 25%. From the research in Shanghai (Beckett & Thoburn 2002) the breakdown rate was under 7%. Although in the early stages of the project, this highlights the fact that the Chinese society is based on the nuclear family and strong community support, and has much to offer the world in developing models of best practice for disadvantaged children in substitute family care.

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