

ProjectsAbroad

Projects Abroad Mongolia Official Newsletter November 2013



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World Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus day in Mongolia

"Children with disabilities have the power to show that the barriers which they have to overcome are not as big as the barriers society puts in their way" Katarína Turčeková, Mother of a child with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus. Slovakia

The World Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Day is significant as it reminds the public and policy makers that Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus are a reality and that is imperative to increase awareness about them and improve the lives of people living with these impairments.

With this purpose, Mongolian Spina Bifida Foundation and Projects Abroad Mongolia have organized the International Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus day in Mongolia very first time in 24th of October. A flash mob (appealing usage of folic acid) and a dream outreach to raise awareness and understanding about Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus were held successfully in that day. It was also a means to advocate and promote the rights of persons with these impairments.



Students from the school 13, one of our teaching placements, involved in the Flash Mob by dancing and singing together with the children with Spina Bifida to appeal usage of folic acid for protection from spina bifida and to raise awareness and understanding about this impairment. A Parkour performance by teenagers from different schools in UB and the dance (Flash Mob) at the Beatles statue was broadcasted on live via 2 different TV stations nationwide and representatives of the Spina Bifida Foundation, Projects Abroad Mongolia and children with spina bifida were interviewed to give information by the TV reporters.



The dream outreach, the second part of the event, was held at the 976 Art Gallery to make children happy and raise their voice to the public and policy makers by making their Dream Board. Projects Abroad all the volunteers from different countries and the children with spina bifida made their dream board together which shows that they want to get education in the school and have a ram outside of every school. Making the dream board aimed to submit it to the authorities in the government and raise awareness and remind the lives of people living with these impairments. This outreach was also interviewed by the TV stations and shown on the evening news of that day.

Also during this event, some of the celebrity singers and magician performed for children and Anton Vanderkerken, one of our volunteers, performed Mongolian traditional instrument (Morin Khuur) and throat singing (Khuumii) in front of the children, their parents and all the guests.



Some organizations, companies and individuals donated monthly usage of pampers, woolen scarf and socks etc for the children and children also showed their talents and performed for the guests as well.

We thank to all the organizations and individuals who helped and made your own contributions to make this event happen.

As from 2013 the World Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Day will be celebrated on the 25th October every year in Mongolia.



Christine gains journalism experience while fulfilling her desire to visit Mongolia

Forty-nine-year-old Christine Westgate from New Hampshire, USA, recently completed a month-long journalism project in Mongolia. Desiring experience writing for a newspaper, she was placed at the country's first independent English newspaper, the UB Post.

Currently completing her second degree in comparative literature, Christine plans to pursue work in mental health services research, and return to school in a few years to complete a Master's in Comparative Literature. Her educational background and previous experience writing for a college newspaper assisted her both in deciding on and writing articles, which were her main tasks. As the UB Post is published on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday each week, she had to prepare articles to meet these deadlines, review them and occasionally review other people's work. Christine was also given one assignment to attend a concert featuring a modern showcase of traditional instruments, and cover its content from a foreigner's point of view.

"There's a fine line between writing like you would in a personal journal and writing something that is worthwhile to be put into publication. So there's some sensitivity required," she said.

Some of Christine's articles included "Meet the sea buckthorn: Mongolia's Super-plant", "Trash talk", and "Naadam Car Camping: A Mongolian Epic in Three Parts".



She also wrote about organizations such as the Wheelchair Association and the American Center for Mongolian Studies, an area she saw as an opportunity to make a difference.

“Whenever something gets in the news about an organization, it usually maybe changes something for them, for the positive or negative. So I tend to write more positive journalism, for positive change”, she said.

Besides her assigned tasks, Christine also worked on her personal research projects, including gathering current Mongolian literature, scripts and film, and beginning work for a business research health statistics database. She visited Terelj National Park and went camping with her host family, an experience that brought about an interesting turn of events.

“We ended up staying at a government-run health camp because of the rain. That was really interesting because I think a lot of people don’t get a chance to do that,” she said.

Christine’s experience in Mongolia marked the realization of a hope she once had to visit the Land of the Blue Sky. Having lived in Beijing for 2 years, experiences such as living arrangements and the hot water supply being cut off for a month are not so foreign to her. In fact, she sees her experience as being like visiting the home she left many years ago. As for advice she has for others?

“To be professional and to be open-minded and to not get so immersed in proving yourself that you don’t see the big picture. Don’t be over nervous about things – just wait, feel what needs to be done, and try to fill that gap, but don’t sell yourself short,” Christine recommends.

<http://ubpost.mongolnews.mn/?s=Christine+Westgate&x=0&y=0>



Anton Vanderkerken blends language and culture in a unique placement

25-year-old Anton Vanderkerken from Oudenaarde, Belgium, has completed a language placement with Projects Abroad Mongolia to learn the Mongolian language.

Anton's placement consisted of 3 hours of language study each day at Nom-ekhe, the language school for foreigners in Mongolia's capital city, Ulaanbaatar.

His interest in the Land of the Blue Sky has already taken him to Mongolia once before, where he travelled with a group led by a Mongolian throat singer.

"I was in Mongolia for the first time in July with Dangaa Khosbayar, a professional throat singer who has a music-band called Hosoo & Transmongolia. He was our guide during this 14-day trip through the beautiful countryside," he said.

Anton's desire to return to Mongolia was fueled by the experiences he had during his first trip, causing him to begin searching for ways to go back to the Land of the Blue Sky. Looking online, he stumbled upon Projects Abroad and decided that a language course would be best suited to him.

"I immediately knew that the language course would be the best option for me. It would open many doors if you can speak the language, even if it's basic at first," Anton said.

A musician himself, Anton's fascination with Mongolian culture, specifically traditional throat singing (khuumii) and the horsehead fiddle instrument (morin khuur), started much before his placement with Projects Abroad.

"My interest in Mongolian music and culture started about 6 years ago when I heard khuumii for the first time on YouTube. When I went to see a Mongolian music-band called Sedaa in February 2013, I was so amazed and had goose bumps and tears in my eyes the moment they played their first song. It was so magical. During that moment I felt I had to go to Mongolia."



“Sedaa was the first Mongolian music-band I've seen and afterwards I wanted to learn to play the morin khuur, so I bought one and started learning it by myself. I love this instrument,” Anton said.

This passion for Mongolian culture led to Anton performing at a flashmob as part of “A Conscientious Citizen and Ulaanbaatar Without Dirt,” an event organized by Projects Abroad Mongolia to raise awareness about littering.

He was later invited to perform in a fundraising event for a celebrity artist Naraa’s medical treatment and a Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Day event organized jointly by the Mongolian Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus foundation and Projects Abroad Mongolia.

His performances consisted both of playing the morin khuur and traditional Mongolian throat singing, and his inspiring talent received praise and admiration from local Mongolians.

Anton’s enthusiasm shows no signs of fading even at the end of his placement, as he aims to continue studying the Mongolian language upon returning home to Belgium, in order to resume his studies next year in the country he so admires.

“There is something magical about Mongolia, its culture and of course the beautiful countryside. I also love nature and animals and Mongolia has it all: grasslands, mountains, dunes, rivers, deserts, forests.”

“Come to Mongolia, meet amazing people and definitely go to the countryside for a while: it will clear your mind and soul,” he said.

