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It's the Invisible Things:

An Evaluation of the Volunteer Program in China

1988 – 2013

Cover > Student graduation celebrations for Qinghai University's English Training Program (ETP) in Qinghai Province, China.
Photo > Elena McKinlay

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An Evaluation of the Volunteer Program in China
1988 - 2013

An Australian Volunteers International research project undertaken with the support of AusAID.

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

ASF	Assignment Support Fund
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
AVI	Australian Volunteers International
AVID	Australian Volunteers for International Development
CGS	Community Grants Scheme
ELE	English Language Education
ELT	English Language Training
ESL	English as a Second Language
ETP	English Training Program
ETTI	Eastern Tibetan Training Institute
GTET	Green Technology & Eco-Tourism
HO	Host Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RV	Returned Volunteer
SAFEA	State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs
SCUK	Save the Children UK
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
YPET	Youth Pre-Employment Training

1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 1988 and 2013, Australian Volunteers International (AVI) placed 180 Australian Volunteers with 65 partner organisations in China under the Australian Government-funded Volunteer Program, now Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID)[1]. In line with strategic changes to the Australian Aid Program, AusAID funding to place Australian Volunteers in China was phased out. The final volunteers completed their assignments in March 2013.

This presented an opportune time to bring together partner organisations and current and returned volunteers to document the history, contributions and lessons learnt of the Volunteer Program to date.

1.1 Key messages from the evaluation:

> The value of partnerships - the evaluation highlighted both the breadth of organisational relationships that AVI developed through the program, and the enduring nature of some partnerships, which include both tertiary education and civil society partners. In addition to the provision of volunteers under the program, AVI brought added value to partners via small grant schemes such as the Planet Wheeler-supported Community Grants Scheme (CGS) which provided funding to host organisations between 2010 and 2012.

> The majority of the program contributed to education, with most volunteers occupying in-line teaching positions across 43 tertiary education institutions.

> The program supported marginalised communities in China (rural, remote, ethnic minority, children and youth) and endeavoured to enhance an emerging civil society, particularly in later years. The four case studies reveal individual, organisational and institutional-level changes, however, the majority of volunteers on the program contributed to the increased capacity of individual students.

> The people-to-people links formed as a result of the program, and the change fostered, emerged as the most prominent contribution, with both volunteers and partner organisations describing the mutual respect and understanding that accrued during volunteer placements.

> Partner organisations in particular attributed high value to the less 'tangible' outcomes of the program, collectively described as 'the invisible changes', referring to the way in which volunteers were able to model and foster new ways of thinking and working in their colleagues and students.

With the closing of the AVID program in China, AVI partner organisations articulated an ongoing appetite for continued opportunities to link and exchange with skilled Australians, and were vocal at the evaluation workshop in encouraging AVI to seek ways to continue fostering Australia-China engagement.

Above > English Training Program (ETP) student from Qinghai University conducts cultural preservation activities, shown here recording Layi (love songs) in Mtso Sngon in Qinghai Province. Photo > Palgon Thar

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[1] AVID is managed by Australian Volunteers International (AVI), Australian Red Cross and Austraining International as Core Partners with the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

2: INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

This program evaluation forms part of AVI's efforts to analyse and document the contributions of volunteering to international development. The evaluation sought to investigate the value of the program as perceived by a range of stakeholders, and, with the closing of the AusAID-funded Volunteer Program in China, the lessons learnt from this review will inform AVI's potential role in future Australia-China engagement.

Evaluation Questions:

> What was the nature and sustainability of volunteer contributions to the work of AVI's partners supporting marginalised groups in China?

> How has the program enhanced or created Australia-China linkages?

> What connections have been observed between English Language Training and community empowerment?

2.2 Evaluation Method and Scope:

Data Collection

The evaluation comprised:

> A desk-based review of program monitoring and evaluation and historical records which provided an overview of the program, with qualitative and quantitative data on assignment outcomes and feedback from Australian Volunteers and partner organisations.

> Interviews with past and present program staff and returned volunteers (RVs). Interviews with the current and three of the previous Country Managers provided a range of perspectives on the role and development of the Volunteer Program in China.

> A reflective workshop with volunteers and host organisations. In November 2012, the four volunteers who were still on assignment attended the workshop with their host organisations (HOs), in addition to representatives from two HOs that AVI worked with until recently, and four returned volunteers remaining in the region. Three spouses of volunteers also participated.

Case Studies

The four case studies (p25) were selected to illustrate the program's contribution to a range of different types of partners: two local Chinese NGOs, one international NGO (INGO) and a provincial university. These particular examples were chosen because the relationship was ongoing, and/or where program monitoring and evaluation (M&E) records gave access to a sufficient depth of information.

Targeted research with RVs enhanced the development of the case studies. All 23 RVs from the four case study organisations were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews exploring the three evaluation questions, and 12 participated.

Limitations

With the program in 'wind down' phase, the opportunity for engaging in greater depth via interviews and the workshop was primarily limited to 'current' relationships existing at the end of the program. While the small scale of the program at the evaluation stage and the time elapsed since a number of significant partnerships were active presented certain limitations, the views expressed by HOs and volunteers in the interviews and workshop were consistent with those in the available program M&E documents.

Beyond basic data on HOs and volunteer and assignment details, the quality and detail of information relating to program development and assignment outcomes was limited. This was particularly true up to 2003, at which time an overall M&E framework for the Volunteer Program was introduced. Following the establishment of a Hanoi-based country program office for Vietnam and China in 2006, the collection and storing of M&E information consistently improved. Of 43 assignments completed since 2006, 39 volunteer and 22 partner organisation End of Assignment reports were available.

2.3 The Report

The report is organised under the following sections:

> Following the *Program Snapshot, Program Context* outlines the national development context and priorities, the place of the Australian Aid Program, and AVI's history in China.

> In *Describing the Program,* AVI's partner organisations and the program's focus areas are introduced.

> The three evaluation questions are discussed under *Analysing Contributions*, followed by a summary of the identified challenges and barriers to capacity development.

> Four *Case Studies* illustrate AVI partnerships with Baoji Xinxing Aid for Street Kids (ASK), Qinghai University's English Training Program (ETP), the Eastern Tibetan Training Institute (ETTI) and Save the Children UK (SCUK, now Save The Children China).

> The *Conclusions / Future Directions* summarise key contributions and point to areas for consideration in AVI's potential role in the future of Australia-China engagement.

Above > Australian Volunteer English Teacher and Adviser describes the word 'beaming' to her students at Hexi University, Gansu Province. Photo > Claude Potvin

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM IN CHINA:
Partners & Assignments by Province; 1988 – 2013

VOLUNTEER GENDER:

- 95 Females (53%)
- 85 Males (47%)

Male participation higher than average – global AVID program is 35%.

ASSIGNMENT FOCUS AREAS

EDUCATION	GOVERNANCE	SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS	HEALTH
77%	10%	7%	6%

PROVINCE	ASSIGNMENTS / PARTNERS	
Yunnan	49	17
Guangxi	42	6
Jiangsu	24	10
Hunan	17	5
Hong Kong	13	6
Shaanxi	10	6
Qinghai	9	2
Gansu	6	2
Guizhou	6	3
Hubei	6	2
Beijing	2	2
Anhui	1	1
Henan	1	1
Inner Mongolia	1	1
Jiangxi	1	1
Jilin	1	1
Shandong	1	1
Xinjiang	1	1

TOTAL ASSIGNMENTS: 191
TOTAL PARTNER ORGANISATIONS: 65
TOTAL VOLUNTEERS: 180

QINGHAI
Partners: 2
Assignments: 9
Years: 2005 - 2010

XINJIANG
Partners: 1
Assignments: 1
Year: 2005

YUNNAN
Partners: 17
Assignments: 49
Years: 1988 - 2012

GUIZHOU
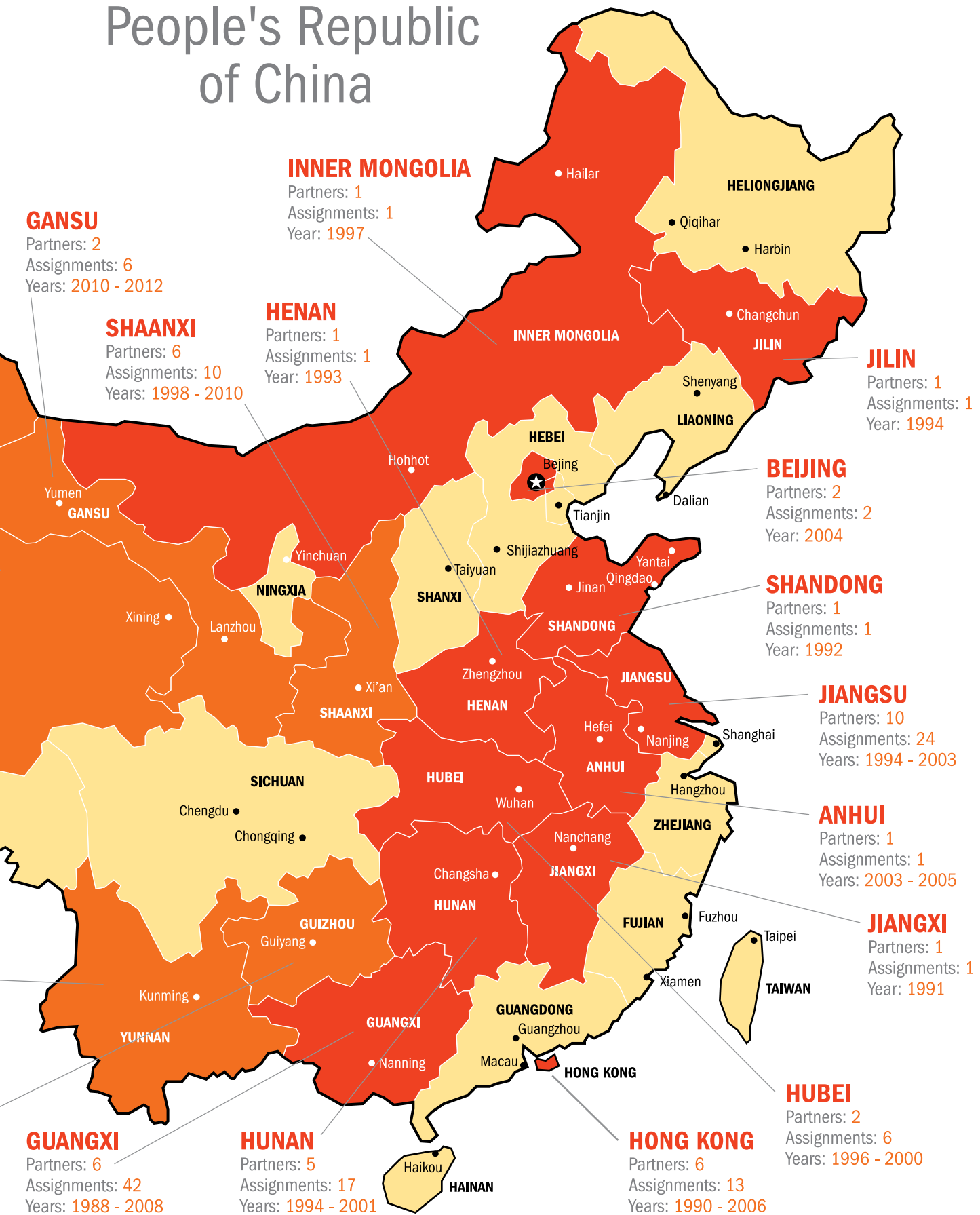Partners: 3
Assignments: 6
Years: 1992 - 2002

Karamay

Kulja

Kashgar

XINJIANG

Goldmud

QINGHAI

Shiquanhe

XIZANG (TIBET)

Lhasa

ASSIGNMENTS / PLACEMENTS – CHINA
ASSIGNMENTS / PLACEMENTS – WESTERN CHINA
REST OF CHINA

People's Republic of China

INNER MONGOLIA
Partners: 1
Assignments: 1
Year: 1997

GANSU
Partners: 2
Assignments: 6
Years: 2010 - 2012

SHAANXI
Partners: 6
Assignments: 10
Years: 1998 - 2010

HENAN
Partners: 1
Assignments: 1
Year: 1993

JILIN
Partners: 1
Assignments: 1
Year: 1994

BEIJING
Partners: 2
Assignments: 2
Year: 2004

SHANDONG
Partners: 1
Assignments: 1
Year: 1992

JIANGSU
Partners: 10
Assignments: 24
Years: 1994 - 2003

ANHUI
Partners: 1
Assignments: 1
Years: 2003 - 2005

JIANGXI
Partners: 1
Assignments: 1
Year: 1991

HUBEI
Partners: 2
Assignments: 6
Years: 1996 - 2000

GUANGXI
Partners: 6
Assignments: 42
Years: 1988 - 2008

HUNAN
Partners: 5
Assignments: 17
Years: 1994 - 2001

HONG KONG
Partners: 6
Assignments: 13
Years: 1990 - 2006

Map labels:
- Hailar
- HELIONGJIANG
- Qiqihar
- Harbin
- Changchun
- JILIN
- INNER MONGOLIA
- Shenyang
- LIAONING
- HEBEI
- Hohhot
- Bejing
- Dalian
- Tianjin
- Yumen
- GANSU
- Yinchuan
- Shijiazhuang
- Yantai
- Qingdao
- NINGXIA
- Taiyuan
- Jinan
- SHANXI
- SHANDONG
- Xining
- Lanzhou
- Zhengzhou
- JIANGSU
- Xi'an
- HENAN
- Hefei
- Nanjing
- Shanghai
- SHAANXI
- ANHUI
- SICHUAN
- HUBEI
- Wuhan
- Hangzhou
- Chengdu
- ZHEJIANG
- Chongqing
- Nanchang
- Changsha
- JIANGXI
- HUNAN
- GUIZHOU
- FUJIAN
- Fuzhou
- Guiyang
- Taipei
- Kunming
- Xiamen
- TAIWAN
- YUNNAN
- GUANGDONG
- GUANGXI
- Guangzhou
- Nanning
- Macau
- HONG KONG
- Haikou
- HAINAN

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4: PROGRAM CONTEXT

4.1 China's Aid and Development Context

The People's Republic of China has undergone dramatic social and economic transformation since the 1970s. The Chinese Government's focus on economic development led to vast improvements in the provision of basic services and gains in poverty reduction. China has either met or is on track to meet all of its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)[2]. China's human development index has increased each year since 1999 at a scale and pace greater than countries starting from a comparable level[3]. Despite these large-scale gains, the benefits of development in the world's second largest economy (predicted to become the largest by 2030) have been unequally distributed, with internal inequality an increasing issue[4].

The majority of people living in poverty, who face lack of access to adequate health care, secure livelihoods and opportunities for education and employment, are concentrated in the western provinces. Many of them belong to ethnic minority groups, who together with rural women are disproportionately affected by poverty and social and political inequality. Environmental sustainability has also emerged as a critical challenge resulting from China's rapid growth.

The Chinese Government's national development strategy is set out in its *12th Five-Year Guideline (2011-2015)*. The Guideline prioritises the development of services and measures to address environmental and social imbalances (most specifically enhancing development of rural and inland areas), and sets targets around pollution reduction, energy efficiency, access to education and healthcare, and expanding social protection. Large amounts of funding have been injected into the western regions since the 1990s under the Chinese Government's 'Open the West' initiative.

4.2 Australian Development Assistance to China

The Australian Government has provided almost 30 years of development assistance to China, largely in the governance, education and health sectors[5]. However, in light of China's development gains and following recommendations from the 2011 Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness, Australia announced that it would conclude all bilateral aid to China by 2013. The Australian Government argued that 'China is now a major global power, with significant economic strengths and resources, and has itself become a major [aid] donor'[6].

The ongoing importance of Australia's relationship with China is seen in deepening trade links and is captured in the strategic objectives around people-to-people links, articulated in the 'Australia in the Asian Century White Paper'[7].

> ### BOX 1: Supporting Civil Society in Hong Kong
>
> *Between 1990 and 2006, AVI placed 10 volunteers in Hong Kong, working in legal and regional development positions with civil society and human rights groups. Volunteers supported the Asian Human Rights Commission, Jesuit Refugee Service, the Asian Centre for the Progress of Peoples, and UNHCR China. Notably, three volunteer Regional Development Officers provided a combined 11 years of volunteer expertise to Asia Pacific International Young Christian Workers from 1994-2006.*

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[2] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *China's Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals 2010 Report*, http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/mdg-reports/asia-pacific/ accessed 28 February 2013.

[3] UNDP, *Access for all: basic public services for 1.3 billion people, 2008 Human Development Report*, http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/asiathepacific/china/name,3421,en.html, accessed 12 March 2013.

[4] AusAID: China Overview, http://ausaid.gov.au/countries/eastasia/china/Pages/home.aspx accessed 3 January 2013.

[5] AusAID, *Aid Activities in China*, http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/eastasia/china/Pages/aid.aspx accessed 8 January 2013.

[6] Australian Government, *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness - Executive Summary*, p142.

[7] Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century*, http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/white-paper accessed 21 March 2013.

4.3 AVI's History in China

In response to expanding bilateral relations between Australia and China, senior AVI staff undertook a series of exploratory visits to China in 1987. There was great demand for large numbers of qualified teachers to build English language capacity in China, and AVI established a relationship with the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs (SAFEA) to facilitate the placement of English language volunteers. SAFEA remained a pivotal agency to the Volunteer Program in China, facilitating relationships with universities and teaching centres in the early days, and granting permissions relating to assignments and the range of partners in the program. Successful partnership development depended on endorsement by SAFEA and the ability of host organisations to negotiate approvals for working with foreigners.

Education, primarily the provision of in-line English language training (ELT, remained a central focus of the program throughout its 25 years; 146 of 191 assignments (77%) contributed to education. English language qualifications are a formal requirement for most higher education and professional opportunities in China (see p20) for further explanation of the English language context in China), and the demand for volunteers was very much driven by the Chinese Government's focus on English language acquisition.

From 2000, the Volunteer Program diversified significantly in terms of the focus areas that volunteers contributed towards and the kinds of partners that they supported. By this point the program was more established, and AVI began to explore broader engagement with an emerging civil society in mainland China. Throughout the 1990s, volunteers had almost exclusively worked in tertiary institutions until approximately 2004, when the split of program partners had become roughly equal (of the 59 assignments between 2004 and 2012, 33 were with tertiary institutions and 26 were with NGOs or UN agencies). This shift reflects the expansion of the program's focus to include sectors such as health, governance (in particular, strengthening the organisational capacity of emerging NGO partners) and supporting sustainable livelihoods.

From 2005, AVI also sought to diversify the way in which volunteers contributed to education in China beyond the university sector, for example with English language education volunteers supporting refugee children through UNHCR China and via a long-term partnership with a local NGO partner, the Eastern Tibetan Training Institute (ETTI), that focused on English language and vocational training for ethnic minority youth.

In terms of program size, the number of volunteer assignments commencing each year rose throughout the 1990s, with the highest number of assignments commencing in 2000 (14). Whilst the program itself diversified from this point in terms of types of partners and focus areas, the size of the program declined throughout the 2000s. See Figure 1, below.

Figure 1: Number of Assignments Commencing Per Calendar Year
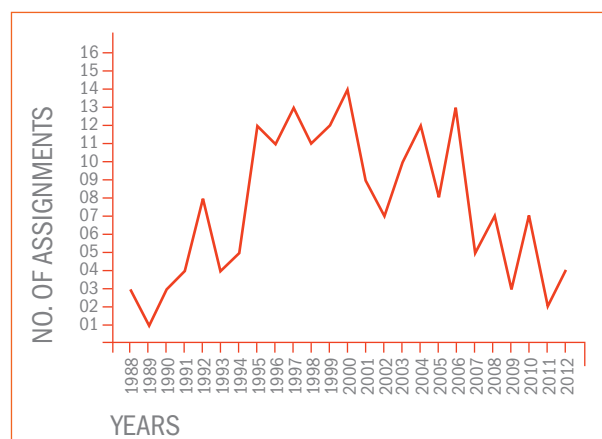
Focus on Western China

Throughout the 1990s, the locations of volunteer assignments in China were widely spread, though most were in the Eastern provinces. From the early 2000s, however, AVI shifted the program to the western provinces of Qinghai, Yunnan, Gansu and Shaanxi, in line with AusAID and Chinese national development priorities, which aimed to address the underdevelopment of rural, remote and ethnic minority regions. To illustrate this geographic shift, only 24% of assignments in the first 12 years of the program were located in Western China, compared with more than 60% from 2000-2012. In the last five years of the program, 85% of assignments were located in Western China.
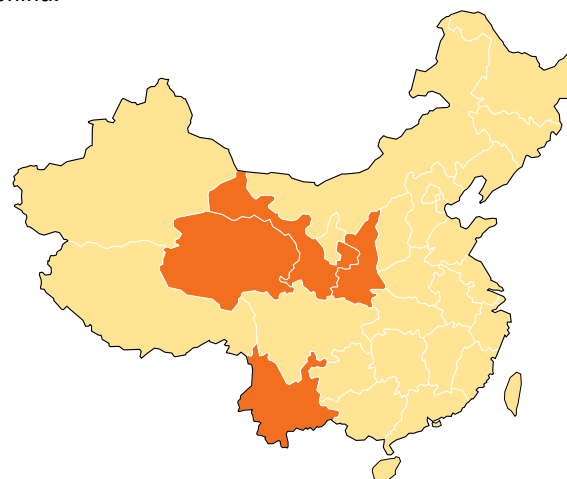
5: DESCRIBING THE PROGRAM

5.1 Partner Organisations

AVI worked with 65 partners across China. While the number of organisational relationships was greatest in the 1990s, the range of 'types' of organisations increased over time. Partner organisations can be categorised into four 'types':

> **Education Institution**
  45 Partners
  143 Assignments
  75% of total assignments for China

> **International NGO**
  10 Partners
  23 Assignments
  12% of total assignments for China

> **Local NGO**
  9 Partners
  20 Assignments
  10% of total assignments for China

> **UN Agency**
  1 Partner
  5 Assignments
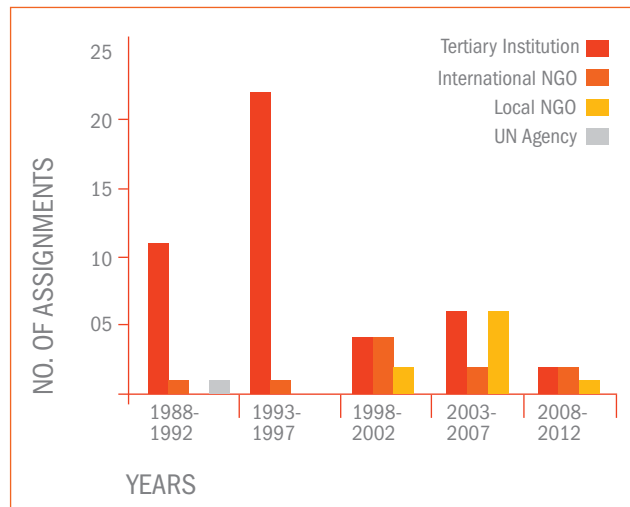 3% of total assignments for China

Although demand from universities seeking skilled volunteers remained high, and Chinese official priorities were education-focused, AVI gradually sought to diversify the program to support civil society actors. AVI's China Country Strategy 2008-2011 outlined that 'although most NGOs have links with government, they operate outside official frameworks and are thus advantaged by their capacity to be innovative and respond to emerging needs'. The strategy of engaging with NGOs was successful in certain cases (as seen in three of the case studies) but the Country Managers interviewed for the evaluation identified a number of challenges with this approach. In China, there is not as clear a distinction between government and a 'civil society' as exists in many other countries. While NGOs and other civil society organisations have increased in number, they generally operate within or closely aligned to government structures. For example, in order to host a volunteer, civil society partners required official endorsement by SAFEA.

Where AVI identified and built relationships with locally registered NGOs, language barriers and their limited organisational capacity to host a volunteer often presented challenges. Resources and the limitations of existing capacity were similarly identified as inhibiting
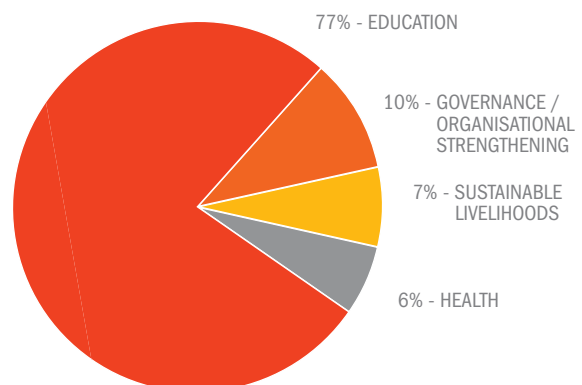
factors to working with local grassroots organisations in a recent review of domestic corporate volunteering in China[8]. Where assignments with local NGOs were not feasible, volunteers provided technical and capacity building inputs on cross-cutting issues to international NGOs including Save the Children UK (now China) and Plan China. INGOs were often well connected to local organisations and these partnerships meant that volunteers could indirectly support local partners which otherwise would not have had the capacity to engage a volunteer.

Although 38% of assignments were located in the NGO sector between 2000-2009, compared with just 7% of assignments between 1990-1999, the overall size of the program in numbers of volunteers declined from the early 2000s, which ultimately affected the continued expansion of civil society engagement.

Figure 2: Partner Categories Over Time

5.2 Focus Areas

77% - EDUCATION

10% - GOVERNANCE / ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTHENING

7% - SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

6% - HEALTH

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8 VSO Research Publication, *Inspiring Corporate Volunteering in China - China Research Study*, October 2012

Education
146 assignments;
77% of total program

136 of the 146 assignments that contributed to education were located in tertiary institutions. The other ten volunteers contributed to education outcomes through assignments with either civil society or UN agency partners between 2005 and 2012.

Consecutive volunteers with ETTI fostered a connection between English language training and local development priorities. They designed and delivered hospitality and eco-tourism courses that were directly linked to local employment outcomes. In addition to the ETTI assignments, seven assignments with Qinghai University's English Training Program (ETP) saw English language volunteers make a similar contribution to community development outcomes whilst supporting a large-scale tertiary institution (see case studies two and three).

Analysis of ELT Assignments

AVI's work to strengthen education in China via ELT, primarily through university partnerships, evolved over the life of the program. Assignments can be broadly categorised as either 'direct ELT' (positions such as English Language Trainer, Teacher Trainer, ESL Instructor) or 'sector-specific ELT', where volunteers taught English for a particular purpose or discipline, for example roles such as Business English Expert or English Expert - Agriculture. Throughout the 1990s, 'direct ELT' assignments constituted the vast proportion of ELT assignments on the Volunteer Program. From 2000, however, the proportion of assignments described as 'sector-specific ELT' increased significantly. While in one sense the program can be said to have specialised over time through recruitment and placement of English teachers with expertise in a specific discipline, volunteer M&E and interviews highlighted that volunteers were primarily utilised as generic English teachers. AVI also endeavoured to bring an increased capacity development emphasis to English training roles, as seen in 16 Teacher Trainers placed with seven university partners from 2002-2009. Despite these roles, Country Managers reflected that the demand from universities remained largely for in-line teaching volunteers.

Beyond Education – other focus areas

Despite the challenges of developing partnerships with civil society actors, assignments with NGO partners constituted 25% of the overall program, with volunteers providing technical expertise and supporting capacity development in health, sustainable livelihoods and governance. Through these avenues, the program contributed to cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, child rights, labour equality and disability.

Governance /
Organisational Strengthening
20 assignments;
10% of total program

Under the governance focus area, volunteers undertook policy, organisational development, and program development roles. The diverse spread of roles that were categorised under 'governance' in AVI's database reflects AVI's endeavours to identify and support civil society actors where possible. The evaluation revealed that volunteers played a particular role in supporting local NGOs that were in their infancy, as was the case with Baoji Xinxing Aid for Street Kids and the Eastern Tibetan Training Institute, both of which benefitted from multiple volunteers in their founding years.

Sustainable Livelihoods
14 assignments;
7% of total program

Between 2000 and 2006, AVI developed a number of partnerships with Chinese civil society organisations working in the environment sector, including The Nature Conservancy (two Eco-Tourism Advisers and an Environmental Education Specialist); the Centre for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (two Support Officers); and the Kunming Institute of Botany (two Research Specialists and a Conservation & Development Officer). There were no further assignments in this area until the 2012 placement of a Rural Development Adviser with Yunnan Agricultural University. This assignment marked the first time a university had requested a community development-focused role (with the exception of the Qinghai University ETP placements).

Health
11 assignments;
6% of total program

Volunteers provided technical expertise to improve health service delivery and community advocacy, from best practice in palliative care, training school teachers to implement and advocate an inclusive approach to HIV in the community, to introducing awareness of disability across programs. Most community health roles were located in the rural programs of INGOs, where volunteers carried out awareness-raising and training with colleagues as well as within communities (see case study three for examples).

AVI's Civil Society Partners in China

Asian Centre for the Progress of Peoples

Asian Human Rights Commission

ASPAC - IYCW Asia Pacific International Young Christian Workers

Baoji Xinxing Aid for Street Kids Organisation

Beijing Hui Ling Centre for People with Learning Disabilities

Centre for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge

Centre for Community Development Studies

China Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Green Watershed

Guizhou PRA Network

Jesuit Refugee Service

Plan China

Population Services International

Save the Children Fund UK

The Eastern Tibetan Training Institute

The Nature Conservancy

Ventures in Development

World Vision China

Yunnan Daytop Prevention and Recovery Centre for Drug Dependency

Capacity Development through International Volunteering

In AVI's approach to development through international volunteering, sustainable, positive change is sought through a process of 'capacity development'. Working with organisations that have invited AVI to enter into a partnership, volunteers contribute to the development of capacity at the individual, organisational and institutional levels to achieve the goals AVI's partners set for themselves. In undertaking the evaluation, a key line of enquiry was to understand whether and how the Volunteer Program in China contributed to the development of capacity at these three levels. The following analysis, organised according to the evaluation questions, and the four case studies provide examples of outcomes across all three. Ultimately, in reviewing the entire program, the development of greater awareness of (and connectedness between) Australia and China at the people-to-people level emerged as the most prominent contribution.

> *"The invisible things are most important… philosophy, concepts, new ways of thinking and working".*
>
> *– Partner organisation representative, Reflection Workshop, November 2012*

6.1 What was the nature and sustainability of volunteer contributions to the work of AVI's partners supporting marginalised groups in China?

The development of AVI's partnerships in China during the 25 years of the Volunteer Program reflected an increasing focus on supporting marginalised communities, and the nature of volunteer contributions evolved with it. The majority of volunteers, being placed in in-line roles in universities, enhanced the individual development and opportunities of large numbers of students (many of whom were from marginalised communities), as discussed on p18. It is difficult to quantify outcomes at this level, though anecdotal evidence from partners and volunteers points to the reach of Australian Volunteer expertise across AVI's 43 university partners being substantial.

By contrast, where AVI was able to foster effective civil society relationships in the growing NGO sector, it provided an environment that was conducive to organisational capacity development. Case studies one and four outline the value that consecutive volunteers brought to local NGO partners in their founding years, particularly through mentoring local counterparts and

developing systems and practices that were still in place at the time of the evaluation. In contrast, established INGOs were more likely to request technical expertise, particularly in relation to volunteer's promoting and implementing responses to cross-cutting issues across their dispersed operations (see case study four), thereby fostering capacity development at the institutional level.

The various volunteer contributions to organisational capacity development identified in this study have been grouped under two headings: Strengthening Programs and Promoting Inclusion; and Improved Networking and Advocacy.

Strengthening Programs and Promoting Inclusion

Volunteers strengthened partner organisation programs through policy formulation, program design and planning, and fundraising and donor management. This work included volunteers promoting social inclusion in areas such as child rights and HIV/AIDS. In INGOs which had identified a need for increased attention to existing cross-cutting themes, volunteers played an important internal advocacy role.

One volunteer with Save the Children UK visited regional areas to assess prevailing practices for children with disabilities and provided guidance on ways to implement disability inclusion across a range of programs, from child relief centres to a water and sanitation project in Lhasa. A volunteer Program Coordinator Adviser (2010-2012) worked with colleagues in an urban street children's centre to enhance outreach into the surrounding mountain areas. The outreach program now reaches particularly vulnerable children with very limited access to services. Since departing, the volunteer has remained in contact with his local colleagues and continues to assist with the editing of the organisation's reporting and promotional activities.

Volunteers raised awareness within a number of focus areas, including HIV/AIDS, disability, child rights and social inclusion through the development of training modules for partner workshops and community project work. A volunteer Livelihood Program Consultant (2008-2009) placed with Plan China initiated an evaluation of the organisation's Rural Women's Empowerment Program across five provincial counties. A colleague reported that *"as a result of the volunteer's coaching and gentle approach, rural women are empowered in terms of participating in community development planning"*, and pointed to the volunteer's subsequent drafting of a set of recommendations, indicating that these would be adopted across other rural empowerment programs.

BOX 2: Community Grants Scheme in China: Yunnan Daytop Drug Addiction Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre HIV/AIDS training for law enforcement officers
March - July 2010, AUD $4,912.66

Yunnan Daytop, a therapeutic community drug rehabilitation centre, works to prevent HIV transmission through education in the Yunnan Province, a region with one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in China.

A volunteer Fundraising and Program Development Officer (2009-2010) received CGS funding for Daytop to facilitate a series of workshops for Law Enforcement Officials (LEOs) and community workers to strengthen their understanding of Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) and People Living with HIV (PLHIV). The workshops focused on improving communication between these groups so they could better work together to reduce HIV.

Daytop delivered training to 216 LEOs from the Yunnan Police University and 111 community workers from the Shilin, Donghua and Yongchan communities. Participants particularly valued the opportunity to communicate directly with former IDUs, with one participant noting that:

Above > Law Enforcement Officials (LEOs) and community workers participate in training to enhance their understanding of HIV/AIDS issues in their communities. Photo > Yunnan Daytop Drug Addiction Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre.

"Through the shared experiences of a former IDU, I learnt much more about HIV/AIDS and drugs. My hometown is located next to the Golden Triangle District and the drug problems there have had an influence on our lives. I saw my neighbours being caught as drug dealer. They dealt with drugs for benefit or getting out of poverty. They were not aware that their behaviour was illegal because most of them were illiterate and had no access to drug education. Through the trainings, I realised that discrimination existed in our everyday lives, especially regarding IDUs and PLWHIV. Maybe most people did not realise it, and just thought about staying away from the IDUs and PLWHIV, however, as we know, distance means discrimination".

In another case, AVI's partnership with UNHCR China resulted in increased access to education for refugee children in a provincial area. A change in government policy had resulted in children being removed from the public schooling system, with no alternative system established to ensure their ongoing education. A volunteer English Teacher (2008-2010) consulted with the children's families and subsequently designed and delivered English classes to re-commence their schooling. The volunteer also developed a primary education management model for refugees under UNHCR's protection for the agency to adopt. A partner representative wrote at the time: *"This model was developed using the example of schooling of refugees in our city and based on the context UNHCR operates in China. I find the model very useful and will certainly use it as a reference in organising future education programs for refugee children in China."*

Above > Australian Volunteer English Language Expert at Guangxi Teachers University in Guilin, Guangxi Province. Photo > Will Salter.

One volunteer (2005-2007) developed and delivered a series of HIV/AIDS 'Train the Trainer' workshops for implementation by secondary and vocational teachers in a remote province. Her local female counterpart later modified and facilitated the workshops herself. The volunteer also produced a comprehensive module on volunteer management which was subsequently translated into Mandarin and adopted for the management of volunteers by local partners of her host organisation undertaking project work across China.

Improved Networking and Advocacy

International volunteers can bring with them a unique capacity to garner external support (whether based on English language skills or status as a foreigner), increasing the profile and efficacy of their organisations as a result. Volunteers in a variety of NGO settings utilised their expertise and international networks to access funding for their host organisations.

For example, one volunteer with Save the Children UK (2001) drafted a major project submission, which successfully attracted a three year grant from the Netherlands Embassy to support a *National Network for Juvenile Legal Aid*. Another volunteer with Plan China (2009-2010) obtained a substantial grant through the Canadian International Development Agency to fund the development of a three-year Child Protection Program Framework.

A volunteer Livelihood Program Consultant (2008-2009) carried out an extensive consultation process across Plan China's six county offices and its local partners to raise awareness of two key Plan programs; a Rural Women's Empowerment Program and an Agricultural Extension Network. This was a unique approach and led to improved integration of the programs, which had, until then, been largely misunderstood (and consequently barely engaged in) by the county office staff and partners. Staff commented that they felt more confident and engaged in the programs following the volunteer's visits and consultation, and a partner representative recounted that *"community women are now more empowered through the implementation of these projects and coaching from the volunteer".*

A volunteer Regional Development Officer (2003-2006) who supported a regional human rights NGO in Hong Kong was instrumental in promoting an Asia-Pacific labour rights campaign for temporary and migrant workers. The volunteer's manager described how she was *"able to give orientation to the Hong Kong branch regarding young workers issues and bring the actions to deepen their analysis. She improved our networking on workers and human rights issues with big NGOs like Asian Human Rights Commission, Asian Migrant Centre... who then supported our campaigns".*

Beyond Volunteer Placements – Added Value

AVI's approach to working with partners extends beyond the placement of volunteers. In China, AVI collaborated in grant-seeking activities with partners on a number of occasions and provided logistical and administrative support to two study exchanges organised by volunteers with their host organisations. AVI also facilitated access to two small grant schemes. Under the AusAID-funded Assignment Support Fund (ASF), six volunteers were granted a total of $6,852 to enhance the achievement of their assignment objectives. These funds provided ESL resources for university partners, including library materials and recording equipment for an ethnography program. AVI's partnership with the Planet Wheeler Foundation enables the delivery of the Community Grants Scheme (CGS), and in China saw a total of $26,991 disbursed to four partner organisations from 2010-2012, as outlined in the table on p18.

Community Grants Scheme Projects

Yunnan Daytop Drug Addiction Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre

> HIV/AIDS awareness training delivered to 216 law enforcement officers and 111 community workers, particularly focused on responding to the needs of injecting drug users (see Box 2 on p16).

Yunnan Agricultural University

> China Laos Cross Border Yao Community Exchange project.

He Xi University

> Establishment of an English library and resource centre.

Eastern Tibetan Training Institute

> Development and delivery of a 'Green Technology for Eco-Tourism' vocational education course.

6.2 Did the Volunteer Program enhance or create Australia-China linkages?

Beneficial cross-cultural exchange and increased mutual understanding emerged as a key theme in the evaluation. Both the standard program M&E and subsequent research with volunteers and partners pointed to the deep value that stakeholders placed on the people-to-people links that were formed through the Volunteer Program. While there were cases of organisational linkages formed, for example Baoji Xinxing ASK still receives annual visits and support from an Australian high school introduced to them by a volunteer, people-to-people connections were much more apparent through the evaluation. Chinese partners spoke of how their world views were expanded by the presence of volunteers and Australian Volunteers reported returning home with a more nuanced understanding of and respect for Chinese culture. In several instances RVs revealed that they and members of their Australian networks have continued supporting their HO following their assignment.

The following section illustrates the practical as well as less tangible ways in which the inherent cross-cultural exchange was a central aspect of the Volunteer Program's contribution to China.

New Ways of Thinking and Working

Partner organisations were able to identify and describe a range of concrete contributions from volunteer assignments. However, when asked to articulate what kind of overall change the Volunteer Program could be said to have brought about, the clear message was *"the invisible things are most important... philosophy, concepts, new ways of thinking and working"* (Partner organisation representative, Reflection Workshop, November 2012). The appreciation of new ways of thinking and doing, however, does not imply that Chinese counterparts of volunteers did not continue to appreciate and promote 'Chinese' ways. One volunteer frames this in terms of his own experience: *"Cultural difference is a positive. The collectivism of Chinese culture versus the individualism of Western culture - there is much to be learned from both."*

A volunteer who worked in a rural Save the Children UK program described how community members and colleagues *"wanted me to explain Western ways to them, and to explain to me why they thought the Chinese system worked well"*. Volunteers were often seen as a window to a wider world – according to a volunteer working with ethnic minorities in a politically sensitive region, community members *"felt that my being there showed that the world cared about their issues",* and saw the volunteer as a potential avenue to represent the complexities of their context (possibly representing an assumption that individual volunteers have greater influence in their domestic setting than is the case).

The director of a local street children's organisation described numerous ways in which his engagement with Australian Volunteers had expanded his ability to network and seek support for the organisation. The first

volunteer (Technical Adviser; 2006-2009) encouraged the Director to network with a range of international and Chinese organisations: *"normally, it's very hard for normal people to do that (engaging government officials etc) ... we door-knocked City Council, Office of Provincial Affairs, even the City Mayor"*. Although at first encountering reluctance, particularly from local officials, he says: *"... reluctantly, they began to help, now six years later we have a free building with water and heating"*. Other influences which the Director saw as positive while 'not really the Chinese way' included the collaborative nature of decision-making in the organisation - *"we have a round table in our meeting room, even if Ministry people come - it's very unique!"*

A partner representative supported this general idea, saying *"both our staff and community partner staff are happy to work with the volunteer because her working methods are different, innovative and participatory"*.

During the early years of the Volunteer Program, many of the Chinese staff and students with whom volunteers worked had very limited exposure to foreigners. However, with the exposure that the internet and social media platforms have provided, coupled with China's economic growth, this context may have shifted somewhat. It is possible that Western concepts and ways of working in recent years were not quite as unfamiliar or as 'foreign' as in previous years. Despite this, it is clear that the presence of volunteers provided an opportunity to engage face-to-face with a foreigner, and that this interaction enhanced cross-cultural understanding in a way that exposure to popular culture via technology-based mediums could not.

Above > Australian Volunteer English Language Teacher at Guilin Normal College in Guilin, Guangxi Province. Photo > Will Salter

A volunteer who supported Plan China (2008-2009) reflected on her possible influence:

"One area in which I may have had some influence is challenging Chinese understanding and acceptance of particularly Western concepts. This led to an ongoing debate about, for example, "empowerment", interpreted in Chinese as "give power to" whereas I understand it to mean "find power within", participation, community development, politics, etc. Most host organisation staff and key partners enjoy such debates".

– Volunteer M&E, 2012

The Value of Volunteering

Partner organisations articulated a flow-on effect of volunteers modelling and motivating 'social responsibility' in their host communities. The Director of a local NGO which hosted four volunteers from 2006-2011 describes his experience with one volunteer: *"The children all call him 'Ma Shu', uncle in Chinese way. He sets a good example to the community, and a number of college students, company workers, and government officials come to our centre and play with the children. A lot of local volunteers participate in our outreach work, because they want to learn from the international volunteer."*

Another volunteer English Teacher (2008-2010) with UNHCR China promoted both social inclusion and social responsibility in his work, supporting refugee children who had been denied access to mainstream public schooling. His supervisor writes: *"During the assignment, the volunteer also worked closely with two refugee volunteers who helped him conduct maths classes. This is a particularly remarkable achievement for UNHCR as it encouraged the sense of volunteerism among the refugees and was a model of showing how refugees can take responsibility for their own community."* The volunteer, who was proficient in Mandarin, also instigated the formation of a group of local university student volunteers for the implementation of a Chinese language program to better prepare refugee children for integration into mainstream Chinese society.

6.3 What connections have been observed between English Language Training and community empowerment?

A key question in undertaking the evaluation was to explore what contributions to development and community empowerment resulted from Volunteer Program inputs to English teaching. In addressing this question, the evaluation made a distinction between English language roles located in community development contexts and in-line teaching roles in universities. In the first setting, the evaluation highlighted significant contributions to community development, although it also raised a need for further research into the specific role that English language played in these outcomes. In the latter, the large number of in-line teaching volunteers contributed to benefits at the individual student-level rather than community or organisational.

ELT roles in community development contexts

Case Studies two and three describe how English teaching volunteers helped foster community-level outcomes, from promoting environmental awareness and conservation activities to encouraging students to take an active role in their communities. Both of these cases highlight education-focused partners that were unique compared to the general characteristics of most education partnerships in the China Program. The first, ETTI, is a vocational training institution targeted at increasing the capacity of ethnic minority youth to participate in and benefit from their local economy. The second, the English Training Program (ETP), while connected to a provincial university, grew from a project providing targeted education to Tibetan youth.

With the help of CGS funding, a volunteer Vocational Education Instructor placed with ETTI designed, wrote and implemented a Green Technology & Eco-Tourism (GTET) course, the first of its kind for the local region. The course was translated from English into both Tibetan and Mandarin and was delivered to 75 Tibetan students. Students and staff also built an eco-toilet in a significant tourist area of Yunnan province through the course. Not only did this give the students practical building and green plumbing skills, it also gave local residents a 'top-shelf' example of a sustainable composting toilet.

BOX 3: **English and success in China**

The ability to pass English exams, read English texts and communicate orally in English are important determinants of educational, and therefore, career and economic success in China. However, shortfalls in the education system for Chinese minorities are particularly prevalent in English language instruction. Lack of success in English language severely limits opportunities for Chinese minorities to participate in post graduate education, study abroad, and gain employment.

Consequently, programs training minority groups in English, like the ETP, are a key to raising the overall capacity of rural, impoverished communities by providing quality English training.

"The most important outcome achieved was the training of two local women who now have the technical knowledge and skills to run the GTET course again next year. This kind of capacity building enables this course information to be imparted even when I have left the organisation".

– Volunteer M&E, 2011

"The changes the volunteer brought were all positive; he increased our profile within the community by heading up the GTET courses. Certainly his students picked up his passion for the environment and actual observable effects will be deepening for many years... He took the seeds of an idea and developed it into a course that provided training for seventy-five people who will be in the field in some way or the other. All of this will serve as a good foundation for potential future programs and ongoing training".

– Partner M&E, 2011

Based on partner feedback at the reflective workshop, the teaching methods and materials developed by a series of Australian Volunteers at ETTI, are still in use several years later, as one partner representative remarked: *"Before, the teacher would just talk and the students would listen. Lots of memorising words but can't make a sentence". Following the introduction of more interactive teaching methods such as conversation and role play, "now, it's amazing - students can get basic good English in three months".* This points to the added value that ELE volunteers had when their contribution extended beyond the provision of English teaching itself, and incorporated participatory methodologies.

"Volunteers gave the students ownership of their own learning, which represented a major shift in methodology. The other teachers were not so keen in the beginning since it was so different to their usual style, but they came to adopt this approach too – and the students demanded it. Students were more critical than the teachers in the end! We also told the students "mistakes are good - then you learn from them". Overall it was a great outcome in terms of their increased critical and lateral thinking".

– Volunteer M&E, 2013

Above > Australian Volunteer Tourism Adviser (back right) with students at the Eastern Tibetan Training Institute (ETTI) in Zhongdian, Yunnan Province. Photo > Courtesy Anthony Ruge

Education roles in Universities

ELT volunteers placed with universities often reported feeling frustrated that the limitations of in-line teaching roles meant that they weren't able to contribute to organisational capacity development, to promote educational methods, or to engage in professional exchange with local teaching colleagues. One volunteer placed with a large university in 2012, however, documented that he was able to extend his contribution beyond in-line teaching: *"It's been a great privilege to go from direct teaching to also being able to train teachers. I've run workshops in teaching methodologies and about 24 teachers have attended each one – more than expected... Changes in educational methodologies take a long time to effect, this is the start of that process."*

This example, identified at the reflection workshop and later validated in volunteer and partner M&E, highlighted the efficacy of the volunteer's approach to the process of capacity development. While meeting the expectations of the University, he was able to slowly build relationships and engage with motivated colleagues to deliver capacity development activities.

Often working many additional hours to their class schedules, ELT volunteers assisted students with preparing for examinations and competitions, completing further study and scholarship applications, general speech practice, drafting emails, and increasing their confidence in English. One volunteer reported: *"I was involved with sending some half a dozen students abroad for further studies upon the completion of their degrees. These students have gone to the Philippines, Norway, and the USA for both BA and MA studies in a range of disciplines".*

A volunteer English Language Teacher placed in a remote university was instrumental in developing her department's English Library and Resource Centre, which at the time was both under-resourced and under-utilised. The volunteer received CGS funding to enhance the centre, and conducted training for the volunteer library staff in customer service, group facilitation techniques and library management. A subsequent volunteer carried on the centre's management. As a result, the centre, which offered a more interactive and dynamic environment in which English language students could be immersed in their language of study, saw significantly increased usage by staff and students.

BOX 6: What did ELT assignments with university partners look like?

137 volunteers were placed with
43 university partners

Student profile: From the year 2000, the majority of ELT volunteers were located in Western China, where the student bodies comprise ethnic minority and rural students. While China receives large numbers of foreign English teachers via a plethora of mechanisms, the Volunteer Program provided skilled teaching professionals to institutions that reach underserved groups. One university partner organisation was the first in China to be accredited as a university for 'nationalities', and continues to conduct outreach to attract students from all of the recognised ethnic groups. Another partner university located 2000 kilometres from the provincial capital has a very large and dispersed catchment of students.

Assignment profile: ELT volunteers with universities occupied in-line teaching positions (with the exception of 16 Teacher Trainer volunteers that were placed across seven universities between 2002-2009). Volunteers either provided English language training to 'English Major' students or English for Specific Purposes, with some volunteers placed in Agriculture or Economics departments. While there was limited scope to build the capacity of teaching counterparts, which restricted the degree to which ELT placements contributed to organisational capacity development, there were far-reaching benefits from these assignments in the sense that volunteers taught and mentored many hundreds of students. As an example of indicative reach, one volunteer reported that "*approximately 550 English Major students have experienced a range of teaching methodologies that they can use in their future careers as teachers*".

Volunteer perspectives revealed in M&E and at the evaluation workshop emphasised that many RVs saw their primary contribution as directly fostering the capacity of young people to pursue further study, employment or other opportunities. Similarly, host organisation stakeholders placed a very high value on student exposure to foreign ELT volunteers, or 'native English speakers'.

"Students in remote provinces learn English, but without exposure to native speakers they can't understand – or be understood. Foreign teachers help them to practice speaking and listening".

"Compared with Chinese English speakers, native speakers have better content and teaching skills. They are popular because they help students with communication skills - the soft skills".

– Partner representative comments at Reflection Workshop, November 2012

BOX 7: Words from an ETP graduate

*"During [the] English Training Program, I not only learnt fluent English, but I also got opportunities to design, implement and **manage small-scale development projects** for my community... I was also able to join outside class activities such as development workshop classes, gender classes and TOFEL classes. Moreover, **I was one of the founders of a grassroots NGO** with some other young Tibetan classmates. After graduating, I worked for an NGO as a Program Director. I also got the chance to receive training on capacity building at both national and international levels. Currently **I am pursuing my Masters abroad**. I wouldn't have made the above achievements if I was not able to study English. Experiencing more academic opportunities and gaining different knowledge, skills, and social experiences here will create more advanced opportunities for my future. My experiences will also enhance my ability to **help more Tibetans when I return to Qinghai**."*

– ETP Graduate, 2011

The appeal of engaging with foreign teachers meant that volunteers often encountered a blurred line between work and personal time. For volunteers who felt that the direct teaching nature of their roles (as opposed to teacher training) was limiting in terms of making long-term impacts, putting extra effort into engaging with students brought a sense of achievement and of contributing added value beyond classroom teaching. One volunteer who was placed in a remote university remarked how there was great curiosity and interest in him: *"I often worked very hard on the bus home - discussing issues with staff, reviewing papers, students quizzing me intently about culture and belief systems. This was not just idle chatter, [as foreigners] they are trying to relate to you".*

In these contexts, ELT volunteers clearly created opportunities at an individual level. However, the scale of such benefits in terms of numbers impacted and an understanding of the flow-on effects within communities was unfortunately beyond the data available or the scope of this review.

The contrast between the two scenarios (ELT volunteers placed in community-oriented projects versus in-line teaching roles in universities) raises an interesting question about the role of English as a contributor to development outcomes. While English proficiency is clearly one determinant of access to opportunities in China, it is pertinent to question whether the broader community development outcomes observed in connection with ETTI and ETP and the role of volunteers in fostering them, are based on English, or on the approaches and methodologies utilised in these activities. It would take further research to adequately explore any connections between the provision of English language teaching per se and any subsequent development benefits.

Above > Student graduation celebrations for Qinghai University's English Training Program (ETP) in Qinghai Province. Photo > Elena McKinlay

6.4 Challenges and barriers to effective capacity development

The report has so far outlined challenges and barriers to a capacity development approach at the program level, including the demand for in-line teaching roles and constraints on working with civil society in China. The evaluation identified the following challenges experienced by volunteers and counterparts during volunteer assignments.

In reviewing M&E feedback from volunteers and their colleagues, language barriers and understanding of cultural differences stood out as the most pressing challenges. While these issues are experienced by volunteers and counterparts in many countries across the Volunteer Program, in China language played a significant role in determining which organisations could effectively utilise volunteers, making translation an essential aspect of many non-teaching assignments. While the evaluation was not able to assess the number of volunteers who were sent with a functioning degree of Chinese language, anecdotal evidence suggests they were relatively rare.

One volunteer placed with an INGO described her continued efforts to learn Mandarin (in addition to the language of the minority community she worked with) as fundamental to her ability to build ongoing relationships with her host community. These relationships facilitated the success of her assignment and have remained in place a number of years later. "*I tried very hard, I worked at Chinese. If I was just speaking English I wouldn't have been as effective... it is important to communicate in someone's language about sensitive topics*". The volunteer also acknowledged the two-way effort required to communicate with colleagues. The role of language presented another layer of complexity for many volunteers. With the prestige associated with foreign English speakers (many partner organisations reported an increased profile and greater community attention as a result of having a volunteer), volunteers were often called upon to present a 'face' for their host organisations. One example of this being a volunteer who was frequently asked to deliver presentations via a translator despite the fact that she felt her local colleagues were more than capable of delivering the content.

Combined with language difficulties, the mutual 'foreignness' of culture that volunteers and their colleagues were required to negotiate reinforces the important role of the Volunteer Program in fostering understanding and engagement. The importance of cross-cultural learning was prominent in feedback from partner organisations and volunteers. In the latter years of the program, local language training provided to volunteers by AVI was increased, alongside the range of other processes and practices that evolved with the program.

Language proficiency and cultural knowledge accrue slowly, and there were only a very small number of assignments longer than three years on the program (for example two of the volunteers placed with the ETP). However, where volunteers remained for longer periods with AusAID approval, the extended term was a key enabler of language and cultural proficiency and their integration into the host organisation. Similarly, long-term relationships between AVI and its partners enabled more effective placement and utilisation of volunteers for organisational development.

Above > Australian Volunteer English Teacher Trainer at Guangxi University for Nationalities in Nanning, Guangxi Province. Photo > Will Salter

7: CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1.
Baoji Xinxing Aid for Street Kids (ASK)

Baoji 'Xinxing' (New Star) Aid for Street Kids Organisation emerged from a Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) project in 2001, and was registered by a group of Chinese and expatriate MSF staff as an independent NGO in 2006. Operating as a residential centre open 24 hours a day, Xinxing provides immediate assistance, early stage intervention and psycho-social support to street children in order to help them reintegrate back into their families and communities. It also provides vocational education, youth leadership programs and training opportunities, and has an outreach program which services rural and mountainous areas around the city of Baoji.

The Xinxing model is innovative in China, both in being delivered by a local NGO and in contrast to Government-run relief centres, which operate on a 9-5 basis and offer little in terms of rehabilitation or ongoing support. Xinxing focuses on children's emotional and social needs, and the 'end goal' is not always to return a child to their family. This represents a fundamental shift in practice and varies from state-run relief centres, which are mandated to return children to their family or community irrespective of individual circumstances.

Four Australian Volunteers contributed to the extraordinary journey of the founders, staff and children of Xinxing between **2006 and 2011**. Their assignments were **Technical Adviser to the Director** (2008-09); two **Fundraising Advisers** (2008-09; 2010-11); and **Adviser to Program Coordinator** (2010-12).

The Technical Adviser, an Australian co-founder of Xinxing, worked closely with the Chinese Director over three years to promote the Xinxing model and seek sustainable sources of income. This volunteer was instrumental to the organisation's success in its formative years, most significantly by playing a key mentoring role for the Director. The latter described the volunteer as encouraging him to do things he would previously not have ventured without her support and guidance. *"We door-knocked the Baoji City Government, Office of Provincial Affairs, even the City Mayor - normally it is very hard for normal people to do that"*.

During the AVI evaluation workshop in November 2012, the Director reflected on the overall volunteer contribution to Xinxing, which occurred at a time when Xinxing was enjoying significant recognition and support

for its work. Now regarded as a model of good practice for the care and support of street children in China, Xinxing enjoys broad support among the Baoji community, receiving substantial assistance from local organisations and volunteers. Strong relationships with Australian communities in Australia and China are a feature of Xinxing's support base. Perhaps most significantly, Xinxing now receives ongoing funding from the Chinese Government, and, in 2012, was provided with a new centre, improved facilities and substantial contributions towards staffing.

Attaining this position took concerted energy and time, during which Xining staff and the Australian Volunteers focused on networking and advocacy combined with developing Xinxing's work to let it grow and "speak for itself". The Director gained confidence over time as the Provincial Government began not only to listen, but increasingly to support Xinxing and its holistic approach. In late 2012, Xinxing hosted 158 Directors of China's state-run children's relief centres, who came to learn about the Xinxing model and how it could be replicated in other provinces. ASK's Director said: *"Now, we are not door-knocking, they come to us"*.

Volunteer assignment M&E also highlighted a shift in community perceptions and engagement with Xinxing: *"The Xinxing staff were no longer seen as looking after the 'dirty' children, but as supporting vulnerable children in need"*. The Volunteer Program supported this increased engagement from community, business and government through the profile generated by the presence of foreign volunteers (leading to Australian and Chinese media coverage); and through the volunteers' ability to tap into Australian and Chinese business communities.

The final Australian Volunteer (Adviser to Program Coordinator; 2010-2012) was placed to further develop, with his counterpart, a fledgling Outreach Program. The program was designed to extend services to children in hard to reach mountain areas. Xinxing collaborates with local hospitals and rural boarding schools, where children as young as five are sometimes placed by migrant worker parents and often lack basic psycho-social support. The volunteer described the program as he departed in 2012:

"I believe that we exceeded the expectations in terms of the Outreach Program as it is now the most significant and fully organised activity of the centre based on which the organisation is regarded as a model by the local and central government. Its activities are fully scheduled for the whole year with three staff members assigned to specific roles. This has meant that the Outreach Program attracts significant media coverage which, in turn, boosts the organisation's social prestige and is a solid base on which requests for government funding can be built".

– Volunteer M&E, 2012

From bringing technical skills to benefit programs and organisational management, to networking and advocacy, Australian volunteers left their mark on Xinxing in numerous ways, including the less tangible: *"My organisation now uses a roundtable decision-making process. We have a round table in our meeting room, even for Ministers. It's very unique!"*. The Director was very clear in attributing Xinxing's success to the commitment, skills and passion of its local staff, and to the significant role of the partnership with AVI, declaring that *"Without volunteer involvement, there is no Baoji Xinxing"*.

"During last two years, [the volunteer] helped us develop the outreach program in an organised way with precise schedule of fortnightly visits to mountain areas, greatly improved the quality of services provided to the isolated children. The outreach program is a significant part of our work. He goes to mountain areas around the city, no matter it was winter in snow or summer in thunder big rain, he joined us every time and talked to children in a kind and acceptable way in simple both English and Chinese".

– Partner M&E, 2012

Above > Australian Volunteer Technical Adviser with children from Baoji Xinxing Aid for Street Kids (ASK) in Shaanxi Province. Photo > Louis Porter

Below left and right > Australian Volunteer Adviser to Program Coordinator, on an outreach visit in Shaanxi Province. Photo > Claude Potvin

Above > *English Training Program (ETP) students from Qinghai University conduct cultural preservation tractivities, shown here recording Layi (love songs) in Mtso Sngon in Qinghai Province.* Photo > *Palgon Thar*

CASE STUDY 2.

Qinghai University's English Training Program (ETP)[9]

The English Training Program (ETP) was established by two foreign teachers and their local counterparts in Xining City, Qinghai Province, China in 1997. The program brings together foreign volunteer teachers and local teachers to provide high-quality English language training to members of rural minority (primarily Tibetan) communities. Key aspects of the program are:

> student-centred classrooms;

> linguistically and culturally appropriate curricula and teaching resources, all developed in-house;

> a focus on extracurricular activities that encourage students to make meaningful links between classroom;

> learning and community problems; and

> the creation of bridges to further education and employment beyond graduation from the program.

BOX 8: Cultural Preservation

Australian Volunteers initiated two cultural preservation projects during their assignments.

One organisation trains students in audio and video capture for the documentation of endangered folk music and other oral traditions. Student-produced DVDs and MP3 files are then disseminated in local communities. This organisation has been profiled in National Geographic and on ABC Radio. Online archives of members' recordings are managed by the World Oral Literatures Project (University of Cambridge and Yale University).

A second organisation trains local students in still photography and digital storytelling. Members document local stories for online exhibition and produce DVDs for community use. The group has published work in two academic journals and three print exhibitions have been held in Australia and Canada. Two members of the initiative then went on to study film and multimedia journalism abroad.

ETP Outcomes

Longitudinal follow-up carried out by the ETP documented the ETP graduates' contributions to improving living conditions in rural Tibetan communities. Graduates conducted more than 200 grassroots development initiatives, including running water, solar cooker, second-hand clothing, school library, and education projects, and documented traditional culture in more than 80 communities across the Tibetan Plateau. As of 2012, ETP graduates had initiated 12 local NGOs focusing on issues from women's health and education to grassroots poverty alleviation and cultural preservation. More than 70 have studied for BA, MA, and PhD degrees in Europe, the United States, Australia and Asia.

Above > ETP students working on cultural preservation projects interview a singer and fortune teller. Photo > Courtesy Elena McKinlay

ETP Target Participants

Between 1997 and 2012, ETP trained some 800 ethnic minority[10] students from four Chinese provinces with high concentrations of Tibetans (Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan) and the Tibet Autonomous Region, where education and economic indicators are among China's lowest. More than 40% of students' parents are illiterate, and 60% of students' households have no stable source of income, instead subsisting through farming and/or herding and short-term paid labour. Most ETP students were the first in their family to receive a college education.

AVI and the ETP

> The Volunteer Program supported **five English language training volunteers** at the ETP between **2005 and 2010**. **Two English Teachers** and **three Teacher Trainers** provided a combined 12 years of service designing and teaching classes, delivering teacher training and editing support, and advising students and graduates on community development initiatives.

While in the period up to 2012 more than 30 foreigners, (some self-funded and some supported by other volunteer programs) taught in the ETP, the contribution of the Australian Government Volunteer Program was distinguished by AVI's relationship with and consistent support of the program. At one point Australian Volunteers maintained a presence when other foreign personnel left the area. In addition, two of the five volunteers provided more than seven years of combined service and were supported to work with the ETP for the entire duration of the AVI partnership. The extended nature of their assignments (four and three years) was unusual in the Volunteer Program but was approved by AusAID in recognition of the benefits of maintaining the volunteers' cultural, language and organisational familiarity to achieve sustainable outcomes in the ETP. The stability afforded by long-term volunteer assignments enabled the ETP to focus on generating curricula and teaching materials (see Box 9), to enhance organisational structures and to increase funding for the program via staff capacity building initiatives.

Despite a mutually fruitful relationship between AVI and the ETP, the placement of new volunteers with the program ended in 2010 due to challenges in securing volunteer visas.

BOX 9: Teaching and Learning Resources

One volunteer Teacher Trainer utilised participatory methods in the classroom, initiating a student-generated textbook project. From 2007 to 2010, student writing was collated and edited by the volunteer, and used as a basis for English textbooks for Tibetan learners.

In another example, a volunteer co-founded a peer-reviewed academic journal, a forum in which students and graduates of the ETP can publish their work in English while simultaneously broadening knowledge of the Tibetan Plateau and its surrounds. More than 30 ETP students and graduates have published their work in this journal, and many articles serve as class texts for new generations of ETP students.

Volunteer Contributions

Australian Volunteers designed and presented 3000 hours of classes to more than 350 ethnic minority students in the ETP. Like English language volunteers across the China Program, ETP volunteers also contributed by assisting with English editing, project development and fundraising. One volunteer presented a management training course to staff at a community organisation established by ETP graduates. Volunteers also edited more than 50 English proposals and reports for grassroots development projects that benefit impoverished communities across the Tibetan Plateau, and initiated two culture documentation organisations (see Box 8 on p30). These 'extension' activities were supplemented by 150,000 USD of external funds sourced by Australian Volunteers, who also raised approximately 15,000 USD from Australian and international networks for emergency relief work following the devastating 2010 earthquake in Qinghai Province.

Australian Volunteers further supported the objectives of ETP by enabling graduates to apply for studies abroad, offering English test training, application mentorship, and letters of support for more than 40 graduates to attend 18 universities in seven countries. Many of these graduates returned from studies to work in NGOs, universities, businesses, and schools across the Tibetan Plateau, as well as in the ETP itself.

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[10] While most students are Tibetan, other ethnicities such as Mongour (Tu), Monggul, Naxi, Pumi, Lisu, Miao and Bai have also attended the program.

Sustainability

Generation of shareable teaching materials and rural teacher training increased the scope of ETP activities, and have broadened networks with other programs offering English language education to minority youth in Western China. Some examples of volunteer initiatives that have continued or expanded since 2010 include:

> Building on a previous volunteer assignment, in 2013 the ETP received funding to publish five textbooks authored by ETP students *(see Box 9 on p31)*. More than 10,000 books will be distributed to students in five English language programs across the Tibetan Plateau and to 15 rural middle and high schools in Qinghai Province.

> Collated materials from 10 courses designed by volunteers have, since 2010, been accessible through a volunteer-initiated database and continue to be used by local ETP teachers.

> From 2008, the organisations initiated by volunteers have been managed by local staff. Since 2011, one of them has secured ongoing financial support from UNESCO.

> The academic journal co-founded by an Australian Volunteer *(see Box 9)* published 23 issues as of 2013, and is edited by five local and international volunteers. The journal is included among required course materials taught in four United States universities, as well as in the ETP.

The long-term generational impacts of the ETP are beginning to become apparent. Graduates of the program teaching in rural Tibetan areas have trained high school students who are now studying in the Xining ETP.

The 2007 integration of the ETP into Qinghai University has been a key factor in ensuring ETP's sustainability, as is increasing local teaching staff. In 2008, the ETP began employing ETP graduates who had returned from studies abroad, and, as of 2012, five of ETP's eight local teachers were ETP graduates. These local teachers have been awarded for their excellence in teaching, and their classes are observed by professors from all university departments.

Top > ETP student taking notes while recording oral histories.
Photos > Courtesy Elena McKinlay

Middle images > Australian Volunteer English Teacher Trainers and ETP students.
Photos > Courtesy Elena McKinlay

Bottom > Australian Volunteer English Teacher Trainer with students.
Photo > Courtesy Doug Gilmore

Above > *Australian Volunteer Vocational Education Instructor assesses a tourism and hospitality student at ETTI.* *Photo >* *Courtesy Mark Singleton*

CASE STUDY 3.
Eastern Tibetan Training Institute (ETTI)

The nine year relationship between AVI and the Eastern Tibetan Training Institute (ETTI) helped to strengthen the reach and efficacy of the institute's work through the placement of seven skilled Australian Volunteers from 2005-2013.

ETTI is a not-for-profit organisation located in the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, on the edge of the Tibetan plateau. Its mission is to improve the livelihoods of people living in China's western regions, especially disadvantaged Tibetan and minority youth, through specialised English and vocational training that leads to real employment outcomes. ETTI's programs bridge the gap between the rural unemployed and regional job markets in Eastern Tibet. The Institute has a scholarship program whereby ETTI staff select young people from rural areas, with limited opportunity to secure a livelihood for themselves and their families, to participate in a three month vocational training program. The success of ETTI's programs is reflected in the fact that 100% of students from ETTI's scholarship cohort in late 2012 were offered employment immediately following graduation.

Diqing is a poor, mountainous region where annual incomes are typically less than USD100 per person. The area's natural beauty and ethnic diversity has, in recent years, attracted increasing numbers of tourists - both domestic and international. Unfortunately, very few of the Tibetans and other ethnic minorities in the region have the skills needed to find employment in the booming tourism and service sector. Local hotels and tour companies typically recruit staff from outside the region and the rural poor become further marginalised in their own local economy. To correct this imbalance, ETTI was founded in 2005 by an academic from the Australian National University who was undertaking

Above > Australian Volunteer Tourism Adviser with students.
Photo > Anthony Ruge

research in Yunnan Province at that time, along with two local colleagues. They recognised the need to upskill the ethnic minority population, especially young people, if these communities were to have any chance of benefiting from their region's growing economic prosperity.

Through a link with an Australian Volunteer already placed in China, AVI approached ETTI with suggestions for possible volunteer placements in 2005. This was a time when ETTI was still very young but growing. The Director of ETTI warmly welcomed the offer and expressed a need for ESL teachers who could design some of the English courses that the Institute was proposing, as well as assist with ETTI's developing eco-tourism projects. This combination of ESL and eco-tourism teaching and training was seen as a useful way for the Volunteer Program to contribute to community development in China. This had until that time been largely constrained by logistical challenges (such as obtaining visas for volunteers placed with local NGOs) and a general preference by the Chinese government for AVI to place English teaching volunteers in universities.

The **first volunteer Vocational Trainer** was placed with ETTI in **March 2005**. A further **six volunteers** followed, providing a combined total of almost **eight years of volunteer service** up until the closure of the AVID program in China in **March 2013.**

Left > Green Technology and Eco-Tourism (GTET) course students construct a composting eco-toilet in the Shangri-la Alpine Botanical Gardens, under the supervision of an Australian Volunteer Vocational Education Instructor.
Photo > ETTI

Vocational Training Outcomes

Volunteers played a very practical role in bringing ETTI's core mission to life - to provide vocational skills training to minority youth in Eastern Tibet. Volunteers designed, taught and refined courses for this purpose. One such volunteer was placed as a Vocational Education Instructor from 2010-2011. The volunteer secured funding through the AVI-administered Community Grants Scheme to design and implement an innovative Green Technology and Eco-Tourism (GTET) course. ETTI's Director outlines the volunteer's contribution through these courses:

> "Seventy five Tibetan students undertook the training which enabled them to enhance their existing careers and to gain employment in the growing eco-tourism sector. The GTET notes were translated into Mandarin and Tibetan and will be made into module booklets in the near future. Under the volunteer's supervision, the students of the GTET course built a composting eco-toilet in the Shangri-la Alpine Botanical Gardens [described by an ETTI staff member as 'the most beautiful toilet in Shangri-La!"], which also promotes the work of ETTI to the many tourists who visit there. The volunteer trained and built the capacity of two local staff to become the future GTET project manager and GTET assistant. The funding also allowed ETTI to expand its range of short intensive vocational courses that are not offered anywhere in the local area".
> – Partner M&E, 2012

ETTI's 2011 Annual Report contained student testimonials pointing to the success of the GTET course, both in terms of career enhancement and personal development for students, as the following excerpts from evaluation interviews show:

> "This training was really useful for me because the hotel I work at does a lot of social responsibility programs. But now I feel like I have a greater depth of knowledge in the field of eco-tourism, which I can use both in my personal and professional life. My awareness of environmental issues and green methods has been raised. After participating in the training, I'm interested in getting more involved with environmental protection organisations and programming in this region".
> – Student (female)

> "I learned a lot about how to develop an effective eco-village using solar energy, rainwater collection, and waste-water treatment etc. I can directly apply all the knowledge that I gained through the GTET training to my current work and I believe that when I return to my home area after gaining work experience here in Shangri-La, I can take these ideas and methods back with me to start doing eco-tourism related work there too".
> – Student (male)

The GTET program was linked to immediate employment outcomes for participating students but also aimed to raise their awareness about the value of green technology and conservation practices for use in their own lives and communities. ETTI's Director concludes: "Certainly the volunteer's students picked up his passion for the environment... and actual observable effects will be deepening for many years to come."

English Outcomes (learning and teaching)

ETTI students and staff benefited from the long-term presence of volunteers in terms of both learning and teaching English. Volunteers felt they played a key role in building the capacity of their students through innovative approaches to English teaching, as well as that of their local teaching colleagues. Volunteers modelled new methodologies (such as student-centred and problem-based teaching; see Box 4 on p.21 for an example of these in action), and one ETTI staff member described how *"... Volunteers assisted and advised in the organisational strategy of ETTI courses. This involved designing creative ESL programs for all courses, as well as designing feedback systems for course satisfaction and ESL resource accumulation".* Volunteers taught the ESL component of ETTI's highly-regarded Youth Pre-Employment Training (YPET) program over a five year period, and one volunteer describes what he observed in his classes:

> "My students started to gain an awareness of the value of producing their own original work. That is, writing as a form of self-expression, rather than the ad hoc recombination of existing material. They began to develop an awareness of language as a medium of communication, rather than a subject to be mastered, as such, through rote memorisation. Students were exposed to a style of learning which values individual thought and creativity, rather than 'correct' answers".
> – Volunteer M&E, 2006

Another volunteer Tourism Adviser (2006-2008) described how his experience in China prompted him to complete a Masters in ESL upon returning to Australia, and to commence teaching English in migrant and refugee settings. He subsequently shared an extensive collection of resources (pertaining to teaching ESL to marginalised populations) with his colleagues on a return visit to ETTI some years following his assignment.

Organisational Strengthening

ETTI's organisational capacity has also been strengthened through its relationship with AVI. Australian Volunteers have contributed to this through the *"blending of Chinese and Western systems – resource archiving, improving management systems and developing clearer communication to staff of ETTI's priorities and practices. This helped so much in everything being run more effectively at the school"*, says one ETTI staff member. Another volunteer (Teacher of English for Special Purpose; 2012-2013) drafted a forward-looking organisational strategy for ETTI and recently guided staff through important administrative improvements.

Funding shortages are in many ways the most significant challenge for a local NGO such as ETTI. Australian Volunteers have consistently assisted with income generation activities for the Institute, most notably through delivering English courses to fee-paying students throughout ETTI's non-teaching summer period. An ETTI colleague described how one volunteer *"spent much of his time fundraising and seeking sustainable sources of domestic support to ensure our financial independence"*.

Volunteers also contributed to the strengthening of ETTI's local staff capacity, through consistent training and mentoring of their colleagues:

"The volunteer contributed greatly to four of his local colleagues. Due to his background in teaching and curriculum development, he was able to build their capacity in English, computing and personnel management. One colleague commented that she learned more at ETTI in her short time than in her four years of teacher training at University. I attribute 90% of this to the volunteer's humble manner and knowledgeable input. In as much as other staff were able to accommodate new ideas and approaches, he was willing to contribute based on his rich background in education".
– Partner M&E

People-to-People Links

The placement of volunteers led to additional benefits for ETTI beyond provision of technical expertise. The attachment of foreign personnel to a small and remote organisation such as ETTI lent increased visibility to its work. Returned volunteers somewhat uncomfortably described how their presence at ETTI attracted constant media attention, with one volunteer being interviewed by Chinese news media five times during his one year stay.

Links between ETTI and another AVI partner organisation in China, Qinghai University's English Training Program (ETP), were strengthened via the program. In 2013 ETTI received 2,500 free English textbooks as part of funding secured by a volunteer with the ETP under the '*Appropriate English Training Materials for Tibetan Students*' project. Four of the five textbooks sets that ETTI received were written by ETP students (mostly during the classes of two Australian Volunteers) and were edited by a volunteer with ETP colleagues. Two ETP graduates have also been employed by ETTI.

Conclusion

The relationship with ETTI represents AVI's longest partnership with a local NGO across the 25 year Volunteer Program in China. Despite the 2013 closure of the AusAID-funded Volunteer Program in this country, this relationship has been a considerable achievement for both organisations. The practical and ongoing constraints of partnering with a small organisation such as ETTI (in a politically-sensitive setting) amplify the need for open communication, transparency, responsiveness and clear lines of accountability. Following two difficult volunteer placements in the early years of the partnership, AVI undertook a complete review of its relationship with ETTI to determine whether it was appropriate to continue its support. The strength of the relationship between AVI and ETTI management enabled open and frank conversations to take place during this review, and ETTI took active steps to address the issues raised. The relationship flourished in the years following.

Above > Australian Volunteer Program Consultant - Child Welfare in Communities, with colleague in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Western China.
Photo > Courtesy Jen Wiggins

CASE STUDY 4.
Save The Children Fund UK

Through an eight year relationship between AVI and Save the Children UK (SCUK), the Volunteer Program contributed to communities in Western China, strengthening services and advocacy around HIV/AIDS, Child Welfare, Disability and Juvenile Justice.

Save the Children Fund UK (SCUK) began working in Hong Kong in the 1960s, establishing relationships with Government and implementing projects to improve social services for children. With its main representative office located in Beijing since 1999, the organisation has offices in Anhui province and the western provinces of Yunnan, Tibet Autonomous Region and Xinjiang. SCUK in China aims to work with local partners to address the needs of marginalised children and young people through direct interventions, technical support and funding, training programs, and research and advocacy. Priority areas include improving access to and quality of basic services for children affected by migration, children with disabilities, street children and children in conflict with the law. The organisation also has a significant focus on supporting children affected by HIV/AIDS.

AVI's China Program Manager initiated discussions in 1998 with SCUK's China Program Director during AVI field trips from Australia. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, SCUK was diversifying its work and expressed interest in a range of potential volunteer inputs, some of which were envisaged working with SCUK's local partner organisations and others directly supporting SCUK staff.

An **Australian Volunteer Information Technology Librarian** commenced in **February 2000**, the first of **eight volunteers** assigned with SCUK from **2000-2006**, who together provided a combined total of **11 years of service**.

Health Outcomes

A volunteer HIV/AIDS Consultant (2000-2002) was placed in the Yunnan office near the China-Myanmar border, an area which is said to be one of the prime entry points for HIV/AIDS. She worked with the SCUK Yunnan office staff on a project which aimed to reduce transmission of the disease through skills transfer and by educating communities about the spread of the virus. The volunteer conducted seminars on counselling theory and practice and developed training materials to enable local staff to conduct the seminars themselves. At the conclusion of her assignment, she stated that she felt that she had become a valued member of the organisation and that being treated as a colleague helped her to be most effective. She described her lack of local language skills, and limited funds for translation/interpreting, as the factor that most inhibited her assignment. At the conclusion of her assignment, the volunteer was offered a full-time consultancy contract with SCUK, pointing to the organisation's satisfaction with her work.

From 2003 to 2007, four community health volunteers supported SCUK provincial Disability, HIV/AIDS and Child Welfare programs. The volunteers brought technical expertise to SCUK partners in Yunnan, Anhui and Xinjiang and developed capacity in service provision, organisational management and advocacy.

Examining these assignments as a whole, several outcomes routinely emerged. There was evidence of organisational strengthening through volunteers establishing training modules for workshops and presentations. A module on Volunteer Management was implemented across all SCUK's local partners and an M&E manual for local partner organisation projects.

There was also evidence of individual capacity building, with one volunteer describing her sense of achievement in watching her local counterpart confidently design and deliver a series of HIV/AIDS workshops, following a sustained period of mentoring.

"(My organisation) was contracted to (provide workshops for middle school and vocational college teachers) ... including basic information on HIV/AIDS and also participatory teaching methods so that the teachers could use these methods to improve their own teaching. All the teachers who attend the workshops were expected to return to their schools and carry out trainings for their peers, students and students' parents on HIV/AIDS.

Together we gave a total of eight workshops, ranging from two to five days. In the first few, I wrote all the session plans and facilitated the sessions and (my counterpart) translated and helped out with logistics. In the workshops that we have just completed (two five-day workshop – one in Mandarin and one in Uyghur) (she) did more than half of sessions herself. She did not use my session plans, but rather used my template and wrote her own. As a result of this, we now have a very comprehensive training package that she and others can use".

– Volunteer M&E, 2006

Given the time that has elapsed since the active relationship with this partner organisation, AVI was not able to explore capacity development outcomes with local colleagues beyond the feedback contained in existing records.

One volunteer Community Health Promoter (2003-2004) described how SCUK made resources available that enabled her to play an important advocacy role in disability and child rights. For example, the volunteer was funded to travel to regional areas of China to assess prevailing practices and promote SCUK's Child-friendly Schools Program, the aim of which was to build capacity on disability and child-friendly approaches in local schools. In some instances, such as a visit to Xizang province (Tibet), she was accompanied by a local SCUK colleague which enabled the volunteer to transfer her skills and knowledge. These visits also gave the volunteer insight into the stark realities of conditions for children with disabilities in China and the lack of existing infrastructure to support them. She recalls: *"Some of the visits and core activities were very confronting"*. This exposure, however, enhanced the volunteer's capacity to advocate for an increased focus on disability in SCUK's programs and of this she says: *"Behaviour change takes a long time and it's hard to get to the implementation stage. Just getting disability on the agenda was a big success".*

Juvenile Justice

To fill a need for technical capacity in juvenile justice projects, AVI also supported a volunteer Child Rights Project Assistant (2001) in SCUK's Yunnan office. In ten months the volunteer primarily developed and conducted child rights workshops for SCUK's local partner organisations, as well as a range of project reporting and grant seeking activities. The volunteer's greatest contribution was arguably that he drafted a major project submission, successfully attracting a three year grant from the Netherlands Embassy to support a *National Network for Juvenile Legal Aid*. The network linked more than 60 lawyers and other stakeholders through providing newsletters, regional workshops in Hefei, Guanxi, Guangdong and Shanghai; and carried out awareness-raising with provincial officials on youth justice issues.

Left > Schoolchildren in Gulja, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Western China.
Photo > Jen Wiggins

People-to-People Benefits

Despite being an international organisation, cross-cultural exchange and English language exposure were commonly cited as key benefits of the Volunteer Program, consistent with feedback from volunteers' colleagues across the program:

"It was valuable to have input from the foreign perspective and language skill".

"Next to her tremendous contributions in ... technical support she also used her private time teaching staff English and corrected translations for staff's job. She is really and absolutely an international humanist ...".

Beyond placing volunteers, AVI collaborated with this organisation on a joint funding proposal to the AusAID China Engagement Window for an innovative HIV outreach program and provided logistical and visa support to a juvenile justice study tour to Australia.

The final volunteer with SCUK completed her assignment in 2007. This was at a time when overall volunteer numbers across the China program dropped by more than 50%. A change of leadership had also taken place at SCUK, with the departing Program Director having been AVI's key contact for more than ten years, and SCUK engaged in the lengthy process of becoming a registered local NGO in China.

Relationships with INGOs in general represent a small part of the AVI-managed Volunteer Program globally. Where they are in place, these relationships usually respond to a particular issue such as lack of local partner organisations with capacity to support and work with a volunteer. In the China context, INGO partnerships provided an entry point to work with a nascent civil society. Some volunteers felt that the roles they were recruited for were largely gap-filling in nature and that volunteer services would be better utilised in smaller, local NGOs with a crucial shortage of both human and financial resources. In reality, the partnership enabled AVI to work directly with vulnerable communities in a context lacking strong, established civil society actors. Although in recent years civil society organisations have grown in number, logistical challenges (for example visas) and the lack of a constant in-country presence by AVI remained impediments to establishing relationships with potential local partners of this character.

Above top > Australian Volunteer Program Consultant - Child Welfare in Communities, with her SCUK colleagues in Hefei, Anhui Province.

Above > SCUK staff in Hefei, Anhui Province.

Photos > Courtesy Jen Wiggins

In attempting to understand both the impact and constraints of the Volunteer Program in China, this evaluation has responded to three key questions:

1. What was the nature and sustainability of Australian Volunteer contributions to the work of AVI's partners supporting marginalised groups in China?

2. Did the Volunteer Program enhance or create Australia-China linkages?

3. What connections have been observed between English Language Training and community empowerment?

The following themes respond to these key questions:

Nature and Sustainability of Volunteer Contributions

The first question examined the nature and sustainability of volunteer contributions to the work of AVI partners supporting marginalised groups in China, and in doing this several definitive 'threads' emerged. The majority of volunteers on the program were placed in in-line teaching positions within universities and significantly enhanced the individual development and opportunities of vast numbers of students across China, many of whom were from marginalised communities. However, despite some notable exceptions (see Case Study 2), the in-line nature of their roles limited the ability of many of these volunteers to build the capacity of teaching staff within their organisations.

Strengthening Programs and Promoting Inclusion

Civil society partnerships became more prominent in the latter half of the program as the NGO sector in China continued to grow, and these partnerships provided an environment that was more conducive to developing capacity at an organisational level. Many volunteers who were placed with civil society partners played a large role in promoting inclusion within their organisations, particularly in the cross-cutting areas of HIV/AIDS, child rights, and disability. The evaluation also found that volunteers strengthened their partner organisation programs through policy formulation; program design and planning; and fundraising and donor management. The resources and expertise required to undertake such work was largely lacking in these organisations, and the presence of long-term volunteers was a substantial boost to their capacity to pursue inclusive development and deliver services to marginalised groups.

Improved Networking and Advocacy

By virtue of their status as international volunteers (and also through their English language skills), Australian Volunteers brought with them a unique capacity to garner external support, increasing the profile and capacity of their organisations as a result. Through the AusAID-funded Assignment Support Fund and a Community Grants Scheme partnership with Planet Wheeler, AVI was also able make funds available to volunteers for resources, workshops and training which enhanced their assignments. This extended the value of the program beyond the provision of volunteer expertise.

Australia-China Linkages

The second key question examined whether the Volunteer Program enhanced or created Australia-China linkages, and indeed the evaluation revealed this to be a strong aspect of the program. Partners were able to articulate practical contributions by volunteers that boosted their individual and organisational capacity. What also emerged out of the evaluation, however, from both partners and volunteers, was the deep cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding that accrued as a result of the program. This went beyond traditional notions of 'cross-cultural exchange', such as the appreciation and exchange of language and customs, to something far more intangible yet potentially greater.

As articulated by the title of this report, partners felt that the 'invisible things', such as volunteers introducing and modelling new ways of thinking and working, had the greatest impact on their organisations, staff and students.

English Language and Community Empowerment

The third evaluation question centres on the relationship between English and development, in terms of exploring a specific link between English language education (ELE) per-se and community outcomes. It is clear that those ELE volunteers located in community development contexts were able to make significant contributions to community development efforts, though it is unclear what specific role English language played in these outcomes. It is plausible that English was simply the medium through which other 'benefits', such as the volunteers' ability to generate new ideas and approaches in their colleagues and students, were delivered. It is possible - and indeed likely - that it was not the acquisition of English language itself that precipitated, for example, a young student having the confidence to establish their own NGO, to advocate for change within his or her own community, or to apply for international study opportunities. Rather, it is the role of their exposure to long-term Australian Volunteers *through English* that has fostered that mindset.

This points to the dynamic that was at the core of AVI's Volunteer Program in China. The evaluation revealed that, regardless of whether volunteers were working in English language education or whether they were placed with university or civil society partners, there was a common thread running through them. The presence of volunteers brought new ideas to organisations, staff and students. They promoted new ways of thinking, alternative approaches and methodologies, and encouraged innovation. Whilst respecting and appreciating the local culture and 'way of doing things' in their organisations, volunteers played a role in encouraging their colleagues and students to explore new ways of working and offered valuable reassurance by validating - from an external viewpoint - the good work of their organisations.

The evaluation confirmed that capacity development is not solely about the technical qualities that volunteers bring to their assignments. These were important but in many ways secondary to the personal qualities that actually facilitate the process of capacity development. In essence, volunteers played a considerable role as catalysts, rather than drivers, of change. They brought with them the technical skills sought by the partner organisation, but also embodied different ways of thinking and working that could be drawn on by their local colleagues.

Future Directions

With a strong track record of mobilising the participation of Australians from skilled professionals to university students, AVI has an extensive network of organisational relationships within China, and significant recognition from a range of official, university and NGO stakeholders in which AVI's approach is strongly valued. Compared to working with other international agencies, partner organisations asserted that '*with AVI ... we are able to remain independent*' and that volunteer roles were designed around assistance and empowerment rather than '*doing for*'. One partner representative was particularly appreciative of AVI's approach because, as he remarked, '*sooner or later, we are the host. We are the owners of this land*'.

Both volunteers and partner organisations emphasised the importance of the people-to-people connections and cultural exchange between Australia and China that have been documented in this evaluation. They see a role for AVI in continuing to facilitate this based on AVI's existing networks within both Australia and China. In the context of the cessation of official Australian development assistance to China and the increased engagement flagged in the Asian Century White Paper, the emergence of this theme from the evaluation is particularly important. It highlights the opportunity that AVI has to play a role in future Australia-China relationships.

Above > Australian Volunteer Technical Adviser with children from Baoji Xinxing Aid for Street Kids (ASK) in Shaanxi Province. Photo > Louis Porter

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Above > *Students in photography class at Qinghai University's English Training Program (ETP) in Qinghai Province.* *Photo >* *Elena McKinlay*