



GIVE-A-GER PROGRAMME
Annual Report 2014

Programme Description

Established:	2001
Location:	Districts of Ulaanbaatar City
Target group:	The homeless and vulnerable people who live in Ulaanbaatar city
Sponsors:	Chinese International School Hong Kong, and individuals: Andrew Hall, Leonard Bernhardt, Rosemary Owen, Jackie Pries and friends
CNCF Staff:	Project leader Badam, social worker Khongorzul, support staff Saindoo.
CNCF Involvement:	Full responsibility for funding, financial administration and implementation
Funding:	Self-funding
Reporting Period:	October-December 2014
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On behalf of our Foundation and the Sunshine Children of Mongolia, we thank all sponsors for supporting this programme in 2014



Table of Contents

PROGRAMME BACKGROUND	5
PROGRAMME OVERVIEW	7
PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES	8
PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES	9
CASE STUDIES	10





Programme Background

The population of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital city has increased by more than seventy percent in the last twenty years, according to World Bank estimates. Migration from rural areas has seen the population swell from less than 600,000 inhabitants in 1990 to more than 1.2 million today. About forty percent of the country's total population of 3 million now live in Ulaanbaatar.

While reasons for moving to Ulaanbaatar abound, many migrants are former herders seeking new livelihoods after a series of winter disasters or dzud, a phenomenon when a summer drought is followed by an extremely cold winter. Mongolia's worst dzud struck in the winters of 1999-2000, where over 14 million animals perished leaving thousands of rural families destitute.¹

Nomadic life in Mongolia's countryside is extremely tough, but the unforeseen challenges of adjusting to city life can be even more difficult. For many families who migrate to the city with expectations of abundant work opportunities and easily available housing, the scarcity and hardship that greets them is a shock. Dreams of a better life are often quickly shattered and instead, many families are left in situations of far greater desperation, poverty and fear for their future.

As space is both limited and expensive in the Soviet- era residential blocks in central Ulaanbaatar, most migrants simply pitch their traditional dwellings in the suburbs, erect fences and make do with their new homestead. These informal settlements, known as the "ger districts", have now mushroomed around Ulaanbaatar, providing home to an estimated 800,000 people.

Many people in these areas occupy barely habitable shelters, living in either traditional felt tents known as "gers", which are long past their effective life, or in makeshift huts built from old bits of wood, brick, concrete or other discarded materials. With winter temperatures in Mongolia regularly reaching -40°C, these poor quality structures do little to protect families against the climate extremes.

Although Mongolia's iconic ger was designed to effectively shield herders on the move from the harsh elements, like any home, it's constant need for upkeep, combined with one of the world's highest inflation rates, means that many are unable to afford the necessary parts to maintain its durability.

¹Nomads to Migrants: Ulaanbaatar grapples with rural to urban migration, Pearly Jacob, Sep 2, 2012. prljay.wordpress.com/2012/09/02/nomads-to-migrants-ulaanbaatar-grapples-with-rural-to-urban-migration

Hale storms, heavy snow, floods and dust storms, all take their toll on the white, dome-roofed structures that scatter the hillsides around Ulaanbaatar, but unlike in the past, when nomads could easily attain replacement materials, they are now an expensive luxury most just can't afford.

Despite the poor condition of the majority of homes in the ger district, they do at-least provide some form of shelter for the families living inside. For those with so little, having a place to sleep means everything and it is not unusual to find many generations, relatives or even different families sharing the same tiny living space.

Unsurprisingly, existing in these cramped conditions can have numerous physical, mental and social ramifications, ranging from poor health and hygiene to depression, alcoholism, family fragmentation and domestic violence.

This downward spiral towards despair, bad health and diminishing optimism is common in the ger district, but for those who arrive in Ulaanbaatar with even fewer resources, the journey ahead can be even more tough. Families who have no ger of their own, no money to build a shelter or no family or friends to turn to, have no choice but to find shelter on the streets, living under unheated stairwells in city apartment blocks, abandoned building sites, or in dilapidated wooden coal sheds. This bleak existence and unrelenting struggle just to survive is often the start of a desperate life of crime, exploitation and violence, which without outside intervention is often impossible to escape.

Since the start of its operations in Mongolia in 1997, the Christina Noble Children's Foundation has assisted homeless families, those in danger of becoming homeless and those living in barely habitable conditions, with their housing needs. This assistance was formalised with the establishment of the 'Give-a-Ger' programme in 2001; the project also provides support to children who are leaving our ger village shelter.

In total, CNCF has given 822 gers to families in desperate and hopeless situations. Through providing these families with a warm, safe and beautiful home, we have not only protected them from exploitation and abuse, but we have restored their independence, given them a life and not just an existence.

It is with thanks for the love and support of all of our donors that we have been able to give hope back to these families and set them on a journey towards a beautiful and bright future.

We currently have a waiting list of eleven families urgently in need and who are hopeful that someone, somewhere wants to be the person to change their whole world.

One person can make a big difference. YOU can be that one.





Programme Overview

A total of sixteen families approached us in 2014, but as a self-funding programme we sadly could only provide gers for seven of those that we identified as being most in need. By providing homes to these seven families, we have helped to positively change the lives for a total number of nineteen children and eleven adults.

To see newfound faith and happiness alight in such tired and broken eyes has been beautiful to watch and is the essence of what our Give-a-Ger programme is all about.

To ensure the best use of funds, we insist on buying only the highest quality gers that can be purchased in Mongolia. Whilst there are less expensive options, the harsh Mongolian climate means that cheaper gers are rendered nearly useless after just a couple of years. We want to be able to provide these families with something that is going to last them for a long time, giving them peace of mind and security for their futures.

To complete this special gift, we fully outfit the family's new home with expandable beds, cushions, table, chairs, kitchen unit with sink, large wardrobe, chest of drawers, mirror, and the all-important ger stove which is used for both cooking nourishing meals and keeping the family warm in the harsh winter months.

All gers are erected by a professional ger construction company, our social worker team and the family who work together to put up the new ger and within a matter of hours transform the destiny of a family simply in need of a little bit of help.

We do not just give-a-ger we give a beautiful new home. We restore confidence and self-belief by showing every family the utmost respect, dignity and unconditional love.



Programme Objectives

Our objectives in 2014 were simple; to empower destitute, homeless families by providing them with a safe, functional and beautiful new home that they can call their own. Through improving their standards of living, we offer the whole family a platform from which to flourish, helping to reignite their confidence, self-belief and optimism for the future. By taking away the enormous pressure of surviving without the most basic necessity- a home, we free their energy and mind to embark on a rewarding and constructive future, one where the parents are happy and the children are able to go to school.

To do this we:

- Provided every child and family with a comprehensive assessment. Social workers conducted home visits to see firsthand the living conditions of each family and planned the details of the move, such as renting land and in many cases escaping complex family dynamics. A plan was put in place for each family on how the Foundation could best support them now and in the future.
- Provided psychological assistance where necessary. This support is particularly important for the families who received a ger from us, many of who have faced a tremendous amount of hardship, struggle and trauma throughout their lives. In order to change the course of their future, we must help them to overcome the pain of their past.
- Enrolled one of the children on our Sponsorship Programme where possible. This monthly financial support provides a lifeline for families with low incomes and often means the difference between a child going to school or not.
- Helped to protect each family member from exploitation and abuse by providing them with a safe place of their own to sleep at night.
- Provided an environment that is conducive to learning so that children can achieve.
- Helped family members identify goals and objectives, which could improve their lives going forward.
- Gave families hope, optimism and security for their futures, by relieving the fear and anxiety that comes with having no home.
- Improved self-confidence by showing dignity and respect at all times, treating every family with the utmost love and compassion.



Programme Activities

OUR DAILY WORK

The first step is to carefully review applications made to CNCF from families in need. On the form, parents will detail their current living conditions and give an overview of their family history. This is passed on to one of our social workers with priority being given to families who are currently homeless or who are at high risk of becoming homeless.

Next, we make a home visit to see where families are living and determine the most urgent cases. Those who are less urgent but still meet our criteria, will be placed on a waiting list to receive gers as and when funds become available. Criteria for approval is based on, but not limited to: family income, living conditions, disabilities amongst family members, number of children, relationship status of parents and whether or not their current living environment puts them at risk of physical or mental abuse.

Identifying which families to support is only the beginning. Some families have no land and therefore no place to put up a ger. In these cases, our team helps them to find an area to rent. For most families, rent for the less expensive land on the outskirts of the city is affordable but for those who can't pay, the Foundation will provide financial assistance. Once the family's new location has been defined, we will then assist the parents with getting their children into a local school.

After all the necessary arrangements are in place, setting up the ger is relatively quick and simple. A ger construction team delivers the parts to the chosen site and then works together with our social workers and the family to construct the ger. Once up, the linoleum floor is laid, traditional silk material is strung decoratively around the inside walls and the all-important ger stove is installed. At this point, the beautiful new furniture is ready to be brought in, and is mindfully arranged by the family to create their dream home.

After a couple of hours a family's life is transformed and they are ready to embark on a new chapter filled with possibility and hope. This is always a magical moment for everyone involved which is usually marked by a traditional tea ceremony to celebrate the special occasion.

After the ger has been given, CNCF continues to work with these families, ensuring that they keep their ger in good working order and that we continue to support them in every way that we can.

OUTCOMES

In 2014, the Give-a-Ger Programme received applications from sixteen families. Our social worker team carefully reviewed each request, carrying out home visits to each family in order to ensure a full understanding of their living conditions. Seven families who we considered most in need were chosen, providing support for nineteen children and eleven adults in total.

In 2014 we helped:

- A young woman, her mother, and baby daughter move into a new home. Her stepfather had physically and psychologically abused her and her mother, thrown them out of their house, leaving them homeless. Now they are safe and the mother is looking for work.
- A young woman who was living with her mother and sister. In 2006 their home caught fire rendering the family homeless. Already struggling after the tragic death of the father in prison, the family of three was left in a desperately vulnerable and impossible situation. Now, not only do they have a new home, but they have a platform from which to flourish and to re-start their lives with confidence, optimism and hope.
- Provide a safe and happy first home for one of our very special former ger village girls who moved out in 2014. She now lives with her three older sisters in their new ger whilst studying at University to pursue her dream career as a sports teacher.
- A teenage girl on our Sponsorship Programme who was living with her two parents in a tiny dilapidated hut. Her father had a stroke and neither parents are able to work. Now that they have a new home to be proud of the family's spirits have been lifted and they are looking forward to the future with rejuvenated optimism and hope.
- A husband and wife and their nine beautiful children. With no home of their own, this large family was living in cramped conditions with a relative near the city's main cemetery. Now they have a new home big enough for all of them and they are able to enjoy a happy family life with the security and protection of their own home.
- A child on our Sponsorship Programme and her mother. Sadly the girl's father had abandoned the family after the mother was diagnosed with mild brain damage. This left them in an extremely vulnerable and financially difficult position. They now have a beautiful home of their own and regularly financial and emotional support from our Sponsorship Programme. The young girl is studying hard at school and loves living in her new home.
- A young disabled girl who lives alone with her mother. Her father left them when her mother fell pregnant. Prior to receiving a new ger from CNCF, the two were living in appalling conditions inside a coal shed. Now this strong and deserving family are enjoying life with renewed optimism and hope for the future. As with all of our families, we will continue to work with both mother and daughter to ensure their continued personal development and happiness.



SPECIAL EVENTS

Constructing seven gers from October to December 2014, and in doing so providing seven truly deserving families in need with a safe and beautiful place to lay their heads at night with peace of mind, dignity and rejuvenated optimism.

We would like to express our most sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the tremendous love and care of our donors who made this possible. Your support has changed a family's destiny and given them a fundamental platform from which to grow and flourish.

Case Studies

(*names changed for privacy)

ANU*

Anu* was born in Ulaanbaatar in 1998 and lived with her mother, father and sister in a cramped, dilapidated basement. Tragically, a fire engulfed the building and with it their home. The family was suddenly homeless and forced onto the freezing cold streets of Ulaanbaatar. Out of desperation, Anu's father committed a crime and was put in prison. Tragically, he passed away before ever being released.

After his death, Anu's mother, Maagaa, found work in a clinic, however her low salary was not enough to cover rent and school fees. Maagaa was determined that her children were going to receive a good education, but without a home of their own, she was frightened and anxious about the future.

It was during this time that Maagaa heard about CNCF's 'Give-a-Ger' Programme which although seemed like an unrealistic fantasy, did offer a small glimmer of hope for what otherwise felt impossible to achieve: a safe home completely of their own.

Upon application, our social worker team went out to visit the family to evaluate the severity of their situation. Immediately struck by the family's terrible living conditions and the mother's deep longing to provide a better life for her two children, our team made a unanimous decision to help the family.

When we told them that they would be receiving a warm, safe and beautiful new home, they couldn't believe it. It was clear to see from their three faces that receiving such kindness without expectation of anything in return was a new and bewildering experience.

Since receiving their ger, the family's life has continued to flourish. Both children are doing well at school and Maagaa is able to enjoy her two beautiful children growing up.

Through the love and kindness of just one caring donor, this family's whole world has changed. They are finally able to embark on a new and beautiful journey together, one which is free from fear, exploitation and abuse.

BATAAR*

Bataar lived with his wife and nine children in a small and old borrowed ger next to a cemetery. His four eldest children went to school and the youngest five stayed at home. Nine growing children and two adults living in a borrowed ger designed for five was proving to be a very difficult situation for the family and Bataar was under continual pressure to return the ger to its owner. The land was also in a remote part of town, making it very difficult to find work; therefore the family had suffered. In a desperate attempt to provide a home for his family, Bataar applied to a local television programme to try and win a new ger. Unfortunately, he was unsuccessful.

Bataar's family lived on \$90 per month, making a new home a distant dream. The family couldn't afford coal so the majority of their income during winter was spent on cheaper heating sources such as rubber and plastic. This is very common for the poorest families in Mongolia and puts the children's health at risk.

When Bataar's difficult circumstances came to the Foundation's attention, our social workers knew that we had to help. Living so far from any employment effectively trapped Bataar and his family in poverty. Relying on only \$90 a month for eleven people and living in a borrowed home was a situation that would only ever be changed with drastic outside intervention. The Christina Noble Children's Foundation's mission is to break the cycle of poverty, and as such our social workers chose this family to receive a ger through our Give-a-Ger programme as this would have a direct and dramatic impact on their living conditions, well-being, and future income potential.

Upon receiving the new ger, the family were delighted and could not express their gratitude enough. The children were dancing with excitement and their mother was crying, saying that she could not believe they now had a home to call their own. The Foundation also helped secure the family the use of land closer to the city.

Since moving into their new ger Bataar, his wife, and their nine children are much happier; their lives have improved significantly because they now feel more safe and secure. They say their new ger is much warmer than their last ger because of the double layers of felt (this also means it's cheaper to heat), and also that the new beds are much more comfortable than the wooden floor they used to sleep on!

Bataar has now found work as a security guard on a local building site so the family's monthly income has more than doubled. This has greatly improved the family's well-being and has also increased Bataar's confidence. He is now considering starting a business with his brother.







**“The future of our world is the future of our children,
our beautiful children.
For many of them, it is a matter of giving them back their future,
giving them a life, giving them hope and giving them
a childhood they deserve.”**

- Christina Noble -



If you or your organisation are interested in supporting this programme in 2015/2016 please contact our Foundation.
It is only through the kind generosity of others that we are able to continue our work with some of the world's most vulnerable children.

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