

Shaanxi Western Development Foundation

Sponsored by the Shaanxi Province Development and Reform Committee, the Shaanxi Western Development Foundation was founded in 2004 and is a provincial foundation that has government background and can raise funds from the public. The Centre aims to support organizational development and capacity building of volunteer organizations and promote the accountability of the volunteering sector in Shaanxi. SNWDF delivers volunteer training to youth volunteers, community social workers, enterprise employees, and helps them to design volunteering initiatives in their own communities/companies. The foundation also supports some small local NGOs in fundraising.



Currently SNWDF has three main activities:

The **AiLeYi Volunteer Center** brings together volunteers (both individual and corporate volunteers) and charity organizations that request (temporary) staff. AiLeYi especially focuses on supporting organizations that help people with mental disabilities and special educational needs, but also works with other NGO partners. AiLeYi recruits, trains and deploys volunteers. For more information, please visit www.aileyi.com.

The **Green Shaanxi Fund** aims to create environmental awareness among the population of Shaanxi. Examples of Green Shaanxi projects are the release of a Green Commuting Card (featuring carbon-offset of bus travel), tree-planting days, cleaning up litter in the Qinling Mountains, etc. For more information, please visit www.snowdf.org.cn.

Rainbow Fund is a special fund established by the SNWDF in 2007. It is licensed to raise public funds to support and develop effective on-going service projects for children and adults with a variety of mental and physical disabilities. Rainbow Fund and its partners build support networks and a cooperation platform for NGOs, thereby helping to improve and develop services for disabled people in Shaanxi. Examples of projects financed by the Rainbow Fund are; sports days, capacity building sessions for NGOs, advocacy campaigns to stimulate social acceptance of mentally disabled people, exchange programs for special needs teachers and support for parents with mentally disabled children. Since 2009, the Rainbow Fund has successfully organised their annual Rainbow Night, a fundraising event where mentally disabled people, donors and sponsors from the Xi'an community come together. For more information, please visit www.caihongjijin.com.



SNWDF invites companies that want to develop corporate volunteering programs to discuss the

possibilities with them. They welcome sponsorships for AiLeYi local volunteer center, Green Shaanxi Fund and Rainbow Fund and can offer corporate volunteering training and placements with local NGOs. Contact them by e-mailing snwdf@failsafe.nl (English) or snwdf_rainbow@163.com (Chinese) or by calling 029-62969607 (Chinese).

Interview with International Volunteer Ed Sander

1. Nice to meet you. Could you please introduce yourself to our readers and let us know how and when you and your company came to Xi'an?

My name is Ed Sander, I'm from the The Netherlands and have been living in Xi'an since April 2011. I'm an International Volunteer, working as a marketing consultant for Shaanxi Western Development Foundation. I have been placed in this organization by VSO, an international development organization that works in 44 of the poorest countries in the world (yes, even in China 10% of the people are still living in poverty). Unlike other charity organizations VSO does not send money or goods but recruits volunteers in various areas of expertise (e.g. doctors, teachers, consultants) and sends them to Africa or Asia to share their skills with local organizations. The aim is to help these organizations build their capacities, thereby enabling and empowering them to fight poverty and help the disadvantaged in their own countries. More information can be found at www.vsointernational.org.



My role at SNWDF is to advise the team about all things related to marketing and organisational capacity building.

2. What are some of the nuances of this industry within the Xi'an/China operating environment?

There are various challenges in working in charity in China. Even though there is a strong sense of community in China there is also a 'courtyard mentality'. Confucian values place high importance on the extended family, but also tend to consider anything beyond that less important. Fortunately the younger generations in China have two main ambitions: reaching a higher living standard than their parents and giving something back to society. Many young people are therefore highly motivated to volunteer; we just need to connect them to the organisations that need their help.

Another challenge for charity work in China is the general suspicion of the Chinese population of NGOs. Lack of transparency and a history of scandals make the public reluctant to donate their money. As such we have the duty as an NGO to provide as much openness and transparency as we can.

3. What are you and your company working to develop in this city?

The aim of SNWDF is to promote and facilitate volunteering of the general public and corporate volunteers, especially where there is a need for volunteers with grass-root organisations that focus on improving the acceptance and living standards of mentally disabled people in Xi'an.

4. What is the most important project you have taken part in since being in China? Can you tell us something about it?

Projects that I have been involved in in the past year are the implementation of promotion and distribution of the Green Commuting Card (a bus card with a mark-up that is used to off set the carbon emission of commuting), setting up a new website for Rainbow Fund, implementing clear job descriptions for the SNWDF staff and creating marketing databases for Rainbow Fund and AiLeYi volunteer center.

5. What have been some of the most important aspects of doing business in Xi'an/China? What lessons have you learned since working in Xi'an?

Doing business in China comes with its challenges. Besides the obvious language barrier the most important obstacle is the different way of doing business. Westerners are very result-oriented, while Chinese people pay more attention to relationship-orientation. Things take more time and are sometimes less efficient than we are used to, but at the same time connections can open many unexpected doors for you. My most important advice to Westerners would be to read about the culture before coming. Concepts like *guanxi* (connections) and *mianzi* (face) are very important to understand when you're planning to work with Chinese people. Try to grasp these before you arrive and after you arrive, don't judge everything that happens around you based on your own cultural background. Be open-minded and try to understand. Be patient.

6. How have you found the local government to be in terms of responding to some of your issues and needs?

Although SNWDF is not a government organisation, it's has a government background and our team has many connections with government officials, especially in the health care and social care area. These are quite valuable.

7. What sort of outlook do you see for your company in the future?

The developments in volunteering are very promising. The national government has included a very ambitious goal in their latest five-year-plan - to raise volunteering from 3% to 10% (by comparison, in the UK 15% of the population frequently volunteers). Also, companies are starting to realize the value of corporate volunteering as part of their CSR (corporate social responsibility) programs. They understand how they can give something back to their community and how enabling employees to volunteer during working hours builds employee retention and development of their skills. As such, the developments are very positive and I'm certain that SNWDF can play a major role in bringing all involved parties together.

8. What has been the most surprising aspect of living in this city?

Unlike some of the other 1-tier and 2-tier major cities in China, Xi'an is still developing. The number of foreign businesses and expats in Xi'an is still limited, especially if you don't count the teachers. The foreign community is quite small and everybody seems to know everybody. At the same time it is very easy to build friendships with Chinese people, especially the young ones who speak English. My social life has never been as busy as it is now.