

## Making Beijing Better

Helen Boyle simply wanted to give back to China for taking care of her child. She ended up founding an organisation that has now helped thousands of children in Beijing



### THE MIGRANT CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION

(MCF) is a social enterprise that works with disadvantaged children and supports twelve schools in Beijing. To date, it has provided over 4,000 free health check-ups and 400 children with glasses. It also sends out about 70 volunteers each week to teach over 450 kids in schools. We sat down with MCF founder Helen Boyle, to learn more about the foundation she started in 2008.

### How did the MCF come to be?

My background in the UK was in education, spanning some 20 years in lecturing. So when I came to Beijing to spend time with my daughter who was working and studying here, I was curious to see what education was like in China. That was when I came across my first migrant school where I knew I wanted to make a difference. I approached one of the schools' headmasters and asked him how I could help. Soon, I had other schools asking for support.

In about nine months, I had 60 to 70 volunteers. I had no intention of starting this foundation. I just wanted to give something in return for the help my daughter had received from the local community while she was in China. But I saw these migrant children who needed help, and people who

wanted to help, but didn't know where to begin. So that's how MCF started. Instead of going back to the UK, I decided to stay on and continue MCF. The following year, I went back to the UK and registered MCF as a UK charity organisation.

### What help does MCF provide?

MCF provides health check-ups. When I was teaching at migrant schools, I came across students who didn't want to answer questions on the board. I found out that they didn't want to write on the board was because they couldn't see well. So this is when we started doing eye checkups and providing glasses. We also began health checkups, which are still carried out today at the Global Care Hospital in Shuangjing.

### How has MCF made a difference?

I remember of the first 100 children who had check-ups, they found one, Tao Song, a nine-year old boy, who had a heart problem. Everyone thought he was lazy. He was always tired and didn't involve himself in any activities. His health check explained it all: there were three holes in his heart!

I reached out to Beijing United Family Hospital (BJU) and explained the situation: 'I don't have the money to follow this up. Can you help?' After some tests, BJU said he needed an operation immediately, which the BJU Foundation sponsored. They discovered he had more heart issues and once again BJU sponsored his open heart surgery.

Because of the initial health checkups, the amazing response by the

BJU Foundation and hospital staff, Tao Song is today, leading a normal life that any 16-year-old would enjoy.

That's just one story on how MCF's program has made a difference.

### What inspired you to give back?

There were different reasons. As a mother, I believe in developing and supporting children in effective and practical ways. The parents of the children attending these schools work hard so that their kids will have better lives and opportunities. I hope that through my efforts and those of MCF, these aspirations will become a reality.

As parents, we also have a duty to teach our children what's right and what's wrong, and the best way to do that is through example. I believe we can no longer live in a society where we just care for our immediate families. My daughter has traveled to foreign countries and relied on the good nature of strangers to provide safety and friendship. So I wanted to give back too.

### How can we help?

MCF needs **event coordinators** to help organise events to earn money to make MCF sustainable. **Teachers** or anyone who has the necessary skills and commitment to join MCF's team of teaching volunteers. **Writers** to help produce articles, blogs or newsletters and **translators** to properly translate Chinese text to English and vice versa.

MCF, like all volunteer organisations, is first and foremost the sum of all its parts. MCF is nothing without its volunteers who give according to their capacity. By helping the children, we are helping each other.

Visit [www.mcfchina.org](http://www.mcfchina.org) to see more of what it does or to sign up as a volunteer.

