



BAREFOOT SOCIAL WORKERS

We aim to strengthen a safety net for the most disadvantaged children in China so they can build a brighter future for themselves and their families.

Every child not yet reached

China has made enormous progress in raising living standards and improving child well-being. Yet, millions of children remain in poverty, while 4.3 million children are unregistered and unable to fully access basic social services. Nearly 69 million children have been left behind by one or both parents migrating elsewhere for employment.

Significant barriers exist for both government service providers to reach children most in need and for these children and their families to access available services. There is a lack of qualified professionals and community workers trained in child welfare and protection who can ensure timely identification of vulnerable children and their families for referral to social assistance, basic social services or targeted protection services.

Our programme

In partnership with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, UNICEF

piloted the Barefoot Social Workers for children approach in 120 villages, which has since been accepted and adapted by the Government to different contexts to reach children in 120,000 villages, with plans to achieve nationwide coverage by the end of 2018.

UNICEF is working with the Government to establish a community-based safety net for children and their families. Known as the Barefoot Social Workers¹, the model helps create community-based child protection and welfare interventions to ensure that children, especially the most disadvantaged, benefit from a supportive environment that protects them and promotes their welfare. Interventions include identifying children in need, raising community awareness on child welfare and protection, providing training on parenting skills and service demand, psycho-social support games and developing local supportive policies, among others.

¹ UNICEF uses the term 'barefoot social worker' to describe the staff deployed in the service, but government partners and other project participants use the term 'child welfare director'.

Community-based child protection and welfare

The Barefoot Social Workers concept empowers community members to deliver child welfare services to bridge the gap in available professional social workers. Community members with a basic level of education who can demonstrate a positive attitude and commitment to children are trained and supervised to deliver child welfare services.

UNICEF provided financial and technical assistance to the Ministry of Civil Affairs to pilot the model in 120 villages in 12 counties across five provinces. The project has reached 130,000 children through monitoring of the situation of the most vulnerable children; many of those children and their families then received needed child welfare services. More than 9,000 children without sufficient family care accessed a variety of social and economic support, such as nutrition, guardianship arrangements, education and health care. Nearly 83,000 vulnerable children received social assistance, more than 5,000 children successfully applied for civil registration, and nearly 1,400 children with disabilities now receive entitlement to a monthly allowance.

Around 50,000 children and 40,000 caregivers participate in regular group sessions to discuss such topics as how to prevent child injury and violence against children.

A national safety net

Since late 2016, the Government has taken steps to strengthen the care and protection of children left behind in rural areas by migrant parents and other vulnerable children by incorporating the Barefoot Social Workers approach to strengthen community responses for vulnerable children. By the end of 2017, 120,000 villages had adopted the approach, and by April 2018, all 31 provinces had provincial action plans for scaling up services by adapting the model.

The positive results of the Barefoot Social Workers approach and evidence on the needs of vulnerable children have helped to inform national and subnational policies, including the State Council's Opinions on Strengthening Care and Protection for Rural Left-behind Children (2016) and the State Council's Opinions on Strengthening Protection for Vulnerable Children (2016). The Ministry of Civil Affairs aims to achieve national coverage by the end of 2018.

Development of programme guidance

UNICEF helped develop technical and evaluation guidelines and training materials that were distributed to all 31 provinces. Training materials and technical information can be found online and has been accessed by more than 120,000 people as of March 2018.

“We aim to promote the building of a grassroots children’s workforce and strive to achieve full coverage of child welfare and protection supervisors at township level and child welfare directors [or Barefoot Social Workers] at the village/community level this year. ”

– Huang Shuxian, Minister of Civil Affairs

“Our life is not good enough, but the Government’s monthly subsidy [which the Barefoot Social Worker helped the family to apply for] made sure that our two grandchildren have food and go to school. Xiao Lian [the Barefoot Social Worker] often comes to see the kids. I won’t worry about them if I die today. ”

– a grandfather in Yunnan Province



Follow us on Sina Weibo: <http://weibo.com/unicefchina> Tencent Weibo: <http://t.qq.com/unicef>
Visit UNICEF China Website: www.unicef.cn Wechat: [unicefchina](#) Email: beijing@unicef.org