

## Julian Taplin: Making a Difference in Rural China

In 2005, Julian Taplin, an American educator and philanthropist, first laid eyes on the run-down, leaky, drafty school buried in the mountains of Southwest China's Sichuan province.

Thanks to his hard work, and a close partnership with CAFAmerica, a completely refurbished and reinvigorated school was open to students just two years later in 2007.

Four years on and with the transformation of the school complete, fundraising for Phase Two is underway to support the addition of an art and physics lab and expanded living facilities for staff.

It is a philanthropic success story than spans two continents, and underscores the foundation of CAFAmerica's mission: offering expertise for global giving solutions.

As a psychologist and professor, Taplin had taken biannual trips to rural China since 1998, and was well aware of the challenges of delivering education to the remotest parts of the county. So when he saw the school in Tianquan County, set in the crossroads of a village of perhaps 100 residents, it made an indelible impression on him.

"I saw a comparatively awful situation," Taplin says. "The children were open to the weather. The birds would do droppings on their desks. The headmaster's bedroom had newspaper on the walls to keep out the wind."

Residents of Tianquan live much like they did a century ago—without paved roads, cars, or running water. The school that Taplin first saw reflected this fact. Created out of the shell of a dilapidated temple, the original school had only five part-time teachers for 95 students. There was no dormitory or cafeteria. Women teachers lived in a nearby potato shed with a dirt floor and no windows.

The temptation to "do something large and really effective" for the school children, teachers, and community at large was immediately present, according to Taplin.

"We met a child who walked two and a half hours to the school every day. He was not yet five years old," Taplin remembers. "He couldn't have lunch at the school because he didn't have the required 13 cents. So for his meal he would have to walk back home.

He would arrive to school hungry, tired and wet. He needed a place to bunk and to eat, and that is what we set out to build."

Taplin, along with Wang Bin, a friend and like-minded businessman from Hong Kong, undertook the task of finding a way to direct funds to the school. While Taplin was able to visualize the steps of the project, it quickly became apparent that he needed a partner to navigate the complexities of U.S. and international tax and regulatory requirements.

"Donating money internationally takes skill. We needed someone to help," he says.

Taplin interviewed a number of organizations, “but CAFAmerica’s presentation made them rise to the top. They outlined the steps we had to do. Everything was clear.”

“From a neutrality and objectivity standpoint, CAFAmerica concentrated on getting the job done quickly and easily,” Taplin continues. “We never looked back.”

CAFAmerica guided Taplin’s Donor Advised Gifts through The China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF), a national nonprofit and non-governmental organization in Beijing. One of the core tenets of their mission is the construction of Hope Schools—facilities in poor remote areas that are in urgent need of modernization.

This was perfectly in line with Taplin’s goals for the school in Tianquan. “It didn’t take a lot of massaging or cajoling to find out what to do. After CAFAmerica granted the money to CYDF in Beijing, we worked on how to get it to the rural school. It went very smoothly.”

From 2006 to 2007, construction on the school proceeded quickly and efficiently. In March 2007, the newly minted You Ai Hope School was dedicated. Now, children have access to a three-story teaching building with multimedia equipment in every classroom. Students sit on new, sturdy wooden stools, surrounded by weather-proof walls covered with colorful posters and murals. A lab houses 22 computers, all connected to the internet.

“Instead of spending time walking to school, children are learning how to make spreadsheets in Excel,” Taplin says.

Taplin’s family, enthused by the project and encouraged by the ease of support through CAFAmerica, donated money to help build a canteen and dormitories. Taplin donated several thousand books to its library, and a camera for children to learn photography.

These improvements have positively impacted the students’ experiences, as well as lessened the burden on teachers. “Before construction, it used to be a place where teachers only came if they had to. The mindset was, ‘let’s get out of here as soon as we can.’ Now, turnover is sharply down,” Taplin says.

The major step forward represented by the You Ai Hope School has truly left a mark on the community as a whole—it has provided new jobs, and created a safe space where children can grow and learn. When Taplin is there, which is as often as possible, he is struck by the full support of local residents and the school district. “We’ve really gotten the critical mass. It was truly a gathering of the community.”

Indeed, a number of local families, moved by the demonstrated success of the project, made small donations toward its construction.

The collaboration with CAFAmerica has gone so well, Taplin has decided to launch a second phase of the project—building a fourth structure that will house an art and physics lab, as well as additional, upgraded living facilities for staff.

He expects the work on the You Ai Hope School to continue another two-and-a-half years, but is confident that CAFAmerica's global reach and knowledge will help the project flourish. "I see the partnership with CAFAmerica as one of the major stones in the arch," Taplin says.