



## **International Network for School Social Work**

<http://internationalnetwork-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com>

Contact [mhuxtable@olympus.net](mailto:mhuxtable@olympus.net)

### **Electronic Newsletter March 2011**

Editor: Marion Huxtable

#### **Educating the children of Mongolia's herding families Erdenetsetseg Tserenpuu**

In Mongolia, the most sparsely populated country in the world, about 35% of the economically active population is engaged in livestock husbandry. Their homes are in remote areas of the steppe, presenting a challenge for educating the children. Education has long been a high priority in Mongolia and, in spite of the difficulty of bringing education to children of nomadic or semi-nomadic families, formal schooling was extended in 2008 to 12 years and the starting age was lowered to 6 years. Most of these children go away from their parents to live in boarding schools, so that school personnel (teachers and dormitory supervisors) are responsible not just for education but for nutrition, psychological needs, personal care, socialization, daily routines and recreation of young children who are away from their parents for long periods.

#### **Dormitory Life**

The herder families' ger (traditional house or tent) are located up to 200 kilometers away from the school and the parents are involved with their nomadic livestock herding, and so schools with dormitory accommodations in important role in educating families. Every soum (the similar to a county) has its school secondary education program as the school. Adjusting to living in from their parents and homes on many issues for the children, youngest, and some drop out handle being away from parents to the problem of missing home, in the dormitories contribute to adjusting to boarding school life.



rural areas play an children of herder administrative unit with primary and well as a dormitory at a dormitory away the steppe presents especially for the when they cannot and home. In addition the living conditions the difficulty of

For example, 8 to 10 children sleep in one room, there is no central heating, toilets are outside and facilities such as

bathrooms, library and sports halls are lacking. The children are served traditional foods, such as soup with meat and noodles, meat dishes, vegetables, noodles, rice and sometimes buuz, khuushuur or dumplings either steamed or fried in oil. The dormitories, constructed during the socialist period and mostly outdated, are heated with coal burning stoves. Although the dormitory teacher is responsible for all childcare activities for 8 to 9 months of the year, staffing is inadequate. In the 2009/2010 school year, 42,156 children lived in 505 dormitories cared for by 600 dormitory teachers, an average of 70 children per dormitory teacher. In places there are 120 children living in the dormitory for the soum with a single dormitory teacher in charge. The rest of the dormitory staff, consisting of cooks, part-time stoker for the stoves, cleaner and night shift supervisors, have responsibilities other than childcare, so only the dormitory teacher is responsible for the physical and psychological needs of the children.

### **New Policies for Dorm Life**

According to the job description of the dormitory teachers and the real demands of the job of caring for the children's living conditions, the teachers have to be good counselors, tutors and advisors. However, they have not been sufficiently prepared in methods of working with the children, especially in how to cope with issues faced by the young children such as homesickness, adjusting to the being with non-family members. In dealing with these issues faced by was raised, together with how to teachers' ability and knowledge of state policy of enrolling 6-year-old the Ministry of Education of training sessions for the teachers workers designed to improve their competencies in working with a further policy has been Ministry of Education, Culture and coming year "To improve the dorm services for the children". Under this policy, the dorm conditions are to be made more home-like with improved properties such as beds, desks and wardrobes. A new series of trainings for the dorm teachers are planned to help improve the quality of life for the children when they are living in the dorm.



dorm conditions and 2008 the topic of the young children improve the dorm coping with the new children. As a result, conducted a series and school social qualifications and children. In addition announced by the Science for the conditions and its

### **What is Needed**

Although at the policy level there have been many efforts to improve the conditions and comfort of dormitory accommodations, there are in practice no specialists providing professional services needed by the children. So we, School Social Workers Association and National Network of Child Protection and other NGOs working for child rights, consider that the school social workers' new tasks should be working with the dorm teachers to provide professional counseling on how to work with these young children living far away from their parents in the dormitory. To date the school social workers only work in the schools, but not in the dorms. We consider that both the school social workers and the dorm teachers need to be trained in psychological issues such as the attachment needs of young children leaving home for the first time and in methods of working with them.