

## **Dentaid helps develop community oral health programmes in China**

Yunnan is one of China's relatively undeveloped provinces with more poverty-stricken counties than any other province. In 1994, about 7 million people lived below the poverty line of less than an annual average income of 300 yuan per capita.

Dentaid's director of oral health Dr. Robert Yee has recently returned from Nujiang in the Yunang province in China where he has been training oral health workers to evaluate community based oral health programmes. The programmes have been designed to provide oral care services in the deprived remote areas of the province, where there is no access to clinical services. They are being implemented by 'Smiles for Life Yunnan' on behalf of the Chinese government who have been working hard to improve the oral health of the Chinese people through mass communication programmes such as the 'Love-Teeth-Day' campaign, whilst also acknowledging the importance of developing community programmes at a local level.

The schemes have been implemented in the mountainous areas of Yunnan, which are mainly inhabited by subsistence farmers. There is some electricity, but previously, no dental services so those requiring dental treatment would have to travel for days to get care in nearest city or in reality, they would probably just live with the pain or take out their own teeth!

In Yunnan there are no established school toothbrushing programmes, however fluoride toothpastes are available and there is a toothbrushing culture. Smoking continues to be widespread and there is now starting to be an influx of sugary drinks and sweets, therefore these projects dedicated to oral health promotion and prevention couldn't come at a better time.

In September 2006 Robert helped 'Smiles for Life Yunnan' to train 34 village doctors, mainly farmers providing emergency and preventive medical care on a part-time basis, to raise the awareness of oral health within their own communities. The village 'doctors' were trained to teach oral health promotion and do examinations in schools during a two-week course. They had no formal training, but had been selected by the government or their communities to be the new community health officers.

Robert then returned to Yunnan in March 2007 where on his visit he helped the oral health trainers of 'Smiles for Life Yunnan' to design questionnaires, which were used to evaluate the work of the village doctors and their success in oral health promotion. The results were then used to select 16 village doctors for the advanced training course, which will include learning how to perform extractions.

In autumn 2007, Robert will be returning to China to help monitor and evaluate the advanced training programme and also help the oral health trainers to organise the data. Robert will then evaluate the data to measure the impact of the work of the village doctors. On successful completion they will be issued with instrument kits and portable sterilisers to perform basic extractions. Robert is also looking at the implementation of future courses, including training in ART.

In remote rural areas, like Yunnan province, we need to change people's oral hygiene lifestyle by not only encouraging them to use fluoride toothpaste and pay regular visits to the dentist but also by providing them with the information to make pro-active choices about their own oral health needs. The implementation of these local level programmes are key to getting the message across and with the help of you our Dentaid supporters we can educate, empower and improve the lives of disadvantaged communities in China and across the world.