



Blue Skies Arts & Music Programme Annual Report 2016



Traditional Mongolian dance at our Blue Skies Ger Village

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FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

The Christina Noble Children's Foundation is dedicated to serving the physical, medical, educational and emotional needs of vulnerable children in Vietnam and Mongolia. We believe that every child deserves love, respect and freedom from all forms of abuse and exploitation.

We establish long-term relationships with the children we support and empower them to live happy, emotionally rich, and independent lives.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with thanks to the Sovereign Art Foundation and their truly meaningful funding of the Blue Skies Arts & Music Programme since 2011 that we have been able to realise our founder Christina's mission to give the children within our care an emotionally rich, happy and fulfilled childhood. By exposing our young people to creative experiences and self-expression we help them to build a strong and beautiful platform from which their lives can freely flourish.

We would also like to thank the following for their valued and heartfelt contributions to our children's artistic development during 2016:

Aim4R Dance Studio and Aimar Foundation for their enthusiastic cooperation and desire to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds explore the art of dance.

ArtiCour Gallery for sharing their time, space and artistic knowledge with our children, and in doing so cultivating their creativity and ability to express themselves through art.

Amirlakhuin Soyombo NGO for providing advanced art classes for four of our children and arranging such a special exhibition to showcase their work.

White Rabbit Group for introducing our children to a wide range of imaginative and unique craft activities.

We would also like to say a big thank you to all of our amazing volunteers and visitors who have encouraged and developed our children's creativity with various arts, crafts, dance and music activities.

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PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Established	2008
Location	<i>Blue Skies Ger Village</i> , Songino Khaikhan District, Ulaanbaatar The 411th Brigade Boys' Prison
Objectives	To use the transformative power of the arts in enabling disadvantaged children to build self-esteem, confidence, social skills, and develop into happy, fulfilled and expressive young adults by allowing them to explore their imagination and creativity in a safe, supportive and loving environment.
Programme Components	Classes and workshops in the following: Music; Dance; Visual Art; Crafts; Art Therapy
Beneficiaries	Children from the Blue Skies Ger Village, Child Sponsorship Programme and Boys' Prison
Local Partners	Aim4r Dance Studio and Aimar Foundation (Dance), ArtiCour Gallery (Art), Amirlakhuin Soyombo NGO, White Rabbit Group (Crafts)
CNCF Involvement	Fully responsible for funding and programme management, monitoring and evaluation.
CNCF Staff	Mr. Tom Minter, Director of Operations, CNCF Mongolia, and Ms. Lucy Morris, Programme Manager, Blue Skies Arts & Music Programme, CNCF Mongolia
Monitoring and Evaluation	As CNCF is directly responsible for the funding and programme management, regular monitoring and evaluation activities are conducted. Monitoring visits during programme activities are conducted by the manager of the programme. Weekly internal meetings are conducted for CNCF staff to discuss programme related issues and updates. A monthly report is completed by the project leader and an annual report is sent to all stakeholders. Most importantly, the progress the children are making is displayed during various events that are held at least once a quarter such as talent shows and celebrations.
2016 Actual Costs	\$19,352.11 USD
Future Plans	The future plan of our programme is to continue to provide the creative activities that currently support our children's social, psychological and artistic development. Our objectives are to maintain the current curriculum whilst working to enrich our young people's creative experience by seeking out new avenues for self-expression and learning, such as trips to art galleries, performing in concerts, holding exhibitions and volunteer visits from professional musicians, artists and dancers.
Reporting Period	January – December 2016

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PROGRAMME BACKGROUND

Our Founder, Christina Noble, and the Christina Noble Children's Foundation began operations in Mongolia in 1997.

In 2007, to mark the 10th anniversary of our Foundation in Mongolia, a celebration was held at the *Blue Skies Ger Village* in Ulaanbaatar. The highlight of the celebration was a concert staged by the children from the village and from the Child Sponsorship Programme. Christina Noble's daughter, Helenita Pistolas, was so impressed with the singing and dancing talents of the children that she proposed that a full time music and dance programme should be initiated. This has since broadened to the Blue Skies Arts & Music Programme.

Our Foundation strongly believes in the transformative power of the arts in enabling disadvantaged children to build their self-esteem and develop into happy, fulfilled and expressive young adults. We believe that an education without exposure to the arts is not an education. It is just schooling.

Poverty in childhood is often the platform for a lifetime of difficulties. Children raised in poverty are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront. These children experience more stress due to loneliness, aggression, isolation, and deviance in their peer relationships, and they are more likely to describe feeling deprived, embarrassed, picked on, or bullied. As a result, children more often face future struggles in marital and other relationships.¹ There has also been research to show that poverty and its related stresses result in lower academic performance and neural function in children. Art and music play a crucial role in the social, intellectual, cognitive and emotional growth and development of all children.

¹ Eric Jensen "Teaching With Poverty In Mind: What Being Poor Does To Kids' Brains And What Schools Can Do About It" ASCD, 2009



"Life Is Too Short" painted by one of our talented teenage boys living at the ger village

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According to a paper published by the National Endowment for the Arts (USA), ² several studies have revealed positive associations between music and arts activities and developing social skills, like sharing, caring, empathy and a sense of camaraderie. Studies also showed that music and arts help children regulate their emotions, a critical skill for all children, especially those who have been raised in poverty and experience daily emotional stress, like all of the children our Foundation works with. Children are able to express themselves more freely through creativity and develop self-confidence and self-awareness.



Research has shown that an arts education can enhance critical thinking and develop creativity in children³. During the school years there is a tremendous opportunity to turn around the negative impacts of poverty. A recent study ⁴ provides direct evidence that there is a significant measurable improvement of neural function for children who participate in music lessons over a period of time.

According to the study's main author, children with around two years of training showed significant improvement in the neural function relating to language and mathematics cognition; the more exposure to music the child received, the greater the neural function improvement.

Our Blue Skies Arts & Music Programme offers classes suitable for all our children, whether they are new to studying art and music and are just learning the basics, or they have a talent and want to deepen their studies and appreciation.

Through the Arts & Music Programme we have been able to provide our children with a diverse range of creative activities, allocating them the space to explore their active imaginations in a structured and supportive environment. The aim of our programme is to nurture our young people's innate creativity by introducing them to various avenues of artistic expression, and in doing so facilitate the manifestation of their imaginative landscapes, helping them to effectively communicate their thoughts, feelings and emotions.

² The Arts in Early Education: Social and Emotional Benefits of Arts Participation, NEA Office of Research and Analysis, December 2015 <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/arts-in-early-childhood-dec2015-rev.pdf>

³ RJ Deasy "Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development" as published on www.aep-arts.org

⁴ Journal of Neuroscience: "Music Enrichment Programs Improve the Neural Encoding of Speech in At-Risk Children as published on www.jneurosci.org

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Drawing imaginative underwater scenes at a child sponsorship art workshop

The Arts & Music Programme's main emphasis is on freedom of expression; providing our young people with the space to communicate themselves openly and without fear of judgment. For all of the children under our care, many of who have come from backgrounds characterised by emotional pain and abuse, this dedicated time for self-exploration is invaluable and plays an essential role in helping them heal from past trauma.

The pursuits open to our children operate on both an individual and self-reflective level as well as aiming to promote the values of group work, community and togetherness. This is achieved by offering a range of activities, some of which have a more introspective focus where the children are encouraged to work independently, and others where the exercise involves group coordination, the sharing of ideas and working together to finish the task at hand.

Through supporting our children with lessons in the arts we are able to build up their feelings of self-worth by introducing them to an alternative way of learning, often more suitable to their individual needs and cognitive development. Art allows for and celebrates individuality; it encourages diversity and acceptance.



Having fun painting the alphabet with our day care children

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OUR YEAR

2016 Highlights

Our Arts and Music Programme operates across three of our Foundation's projects: the *Blue Skies Ger Village*, Child Sponsorship, and the Boys' Prison. During 2016 our programme included lessons in visual art, craft making, dance and music, benefiting sixty-nine children from our *Blue Skies Ger Village*, one-hundred-and-ten children on our Child Sponsorship Programme and fourteen teenagers at the Boys' Prison. We also provided art therapy sessions for all of the children living at the ger village. In addition to this the children participated in an exciting and enriching range of events, field trips, performances and exhibitions.

Programme	Schedule of classes	Beneficiaries
Blue Skies Ger Village		
Art	January – December, 4 hour art classes took place on Sundays	50
	March – October, advanced art classes took place twice a week in Ulaanbaatar	4 children
Crafts	May – December, craft workshops were held regularly lasting between 2-3 hours each	61 children
Art Therapy	January – December, sessions were held with the children on a weekly basis by our full-time psychotherapist	69 children
Dance	January – December, 3 hour lessons were held on Saturdays with our older children at the Aim4r Dance Studio in Ulaanbaatar	10 children
	April – December, 3 hour lessons were held on Saturdays with our younger children at the ger village	20 children
Music	January - December lessons took place from 9am- 6pm on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Classes were held throughout the day for the children to attend in between their school schedules.	61 children
Sponsorship Programme		
Art Workshops	January – August, 3 artworks took place lasting 4 hours each	25 children
	September – December, 2-3 hour art workshops took place monthly at the ArtiCour Gallery	65 children
Crafts	July, 1 craft workshops was held lasting between 2 – 3 hours	15 children
Dance	January – December, 3 hour lessons were held on Sundays with our older children at the Aim4r Dance Studio in Ulaanbaatar	5 children
Boys' Prison		
Art	January – February, lessons took place 2 times a week lasting 3 hours each	14 children
	August, 1 month art course by a famous Mongolian artist	
	September – December, lessons took place twice a week lasting 3 hours each.	
	Total participations:	399
	Total number of children	193



BLUE SKIES ARTS & MUSIC PROGRAMME 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

193 Children benefited from the Arts & Music Programme

399 Participations

Children including those who take part in more than one class



Children from the Blue Skies Ger Village, Sponsorship Programme and Boys' Prison

158 Children attended art lessons

69 Children received art therapy

61 Children took music lessons

76 Children took part in craft classes

35 Children took part in dance classes

Blue Skies Ger Village Sponsorship Programme

69

110

Boys' Prison

14

lots of special events and performances



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PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES

Art

For all of the children who participate in our art lessons, this dedicated time for creativity and imagination is extremely special and forms a highlight to their schedules.

During the classes our young people have fun exploring different mediums such as clay, pastel, paint and pencil whilst expressing their unique imaginations and creative ideas.

We also work to inspire an interest among our children for different artists, styles and genres. We do this through exposing them to other works of art in galleries, books, and online and encouraging our children to reflect upon and discuss how these pieces make them think and feel.

Blue Skies Ger Village- Visual Art

Art lessons take place every Sunday at 10am until 2pm in our Blue Skies Ger Village classroom. The sessions are open to all of our young people, however over the course of 2016 a core group of fifteen students was formed. These children have shown a keen interest in art and they attend each lesson with enthusiasm and commitment to the subject.

Professional artist, Tsolmonkhuu, uses a variety of different materials and techniques to inspire our children's creativity and help them to build confidence, develop their artistic skills and express themselves freely.

Initially Tsolmonkhuu taught the children how to draw basic forms with graphite pencils. After evolving their skillsets in this area he then began to introduce other mediums such as coloured pencils, acrylics and watercolour. As an experienced sculptor, Tsolmonkhuu has ignited a passion for three-dimensional artwork at the village, teaching the children techniques such as how to mold small figures out of plaster of Paris and how to create detailed designs on clay tiles.



One of our ger village children painted this special portrait of a member of our Foundation's staff



A striking and imaginative work of art produced by one of our talented ger village children

During the lessons the children are given topics such as ‘your future’, ‘family’ and ‘childhood’, and asked to draw, paint or sculpt from their imaginations. To expand their creative thinking further, Tsolmonkhuu also often gives the children simple shapes such as a circle or a triangle and encourages them to form exciting, colourful images like sunshines or animals based on the initial shape. This is a fun activity, which helps the children to loosen up and see the world from a more innovative and original perspective.

Music is played throughout most lessons in order to create a happy and relaxed environment and improve our children’s focus. Our young artists have loved this addition to their lessons, with one of our teenage girls commenting, “I always look forward to Sunday’s lesson. I can go into my own world and forget about all the things that have been on my mind. The music makes me feel very calm and helps me to paint and draw. I always leave the class feeling uplifted and proud of what I have achieved”.

Open discussion, analysis and the sharing of ideas are encouraged as an important part of the artistic process. Through communicating their work to the group and listening to other people’s feedback, our children build feelings of pride, self-esteem and develop confidence in expressing their emotions to others.

It is always fascinating to listen to our children talk about the meanings behind their work, as through their descriptions it is clear to see the value art plays in helping our young people to express themselves in a healthy, positive and rewarding way.

Blue Skies Ger Village – Advanced Art Class

From March to October four of our older children attended advanced art classes twice a week at a studio in Ulaanbaatar. The classes operated in partnership with the NGO 'Amirlakhuin Soyombo' who work to help disadvantaged children in the Songino Khaikhan District. Our children were taught by one of Mongolia’s top artists, Solongo, who worked closely with them over a period of seven months building a collection of work to exhibit. The children loved their lessons and quickly developed a portfolio of highly imaginative and meaningful works of art.

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Blue Skies Ger Village- Art Therapy

Our main goal at the Blue Skies Ger Village is to heal the emotional trauma that affects, to differing degrees, all of the children who live there. Our full-time psychotherapist, Nomin-Erdene, plays a key role in this process and since beginning with us in April 2015 she has helped many children regain trust in a world that has previously caused them significant pain and sadness. It is through the techniques of art therapy that she has been able to connect with these children's internal realities and help them to break negative thought patterns and behaviours that would otherwise most likely stay with them into adulthood.

Nomin-Erdene meets with every child at the village at least once a month. For the children she identifies as being most vulnerable and in need of close attention, art therapy sessions will be arranged anywhere between one and five times a week depending on the child's specific needs. Regular group work is also carried out with all of the children, during which they are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings, and talk about how they can be more supportive of themselves, each other, and their community. Similar to the individual sessions this is also mainly achieved through the use of art, crafts and other creative activities.

Encouraging a child to draw a picture as opposed to asking them a direct question, offers a non-threatening avenue for them to open up and discuss difficult issues. Through talking to our children about their drawings, paintings and crafts, and considering the underlying reasons that inspired their art, Nomin-Erdene has been able to gain a deeper understanding of our young people and work with them closely to resolve any emotional blockages.

This year all sixty-nine children who were living at the ger village on either a permanent or temporary basis received art therapy sessions – a total of 396 meetings. Since beginning her work with our children it has been clear to see the improvements that are continually taking place in their attitudes, behaviour and overall outlooks on life. Through the creative process our children have been able to work with Nomin-Erdene to explore their feelings, resolve emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage their behaviour, develop social skills, reduce anxiety and increase self-esteem.

Our full-time psychotherapist, Nomin-Erdene, uses art therapy as her main method to help our children overcome trauma.



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Boys' Prison

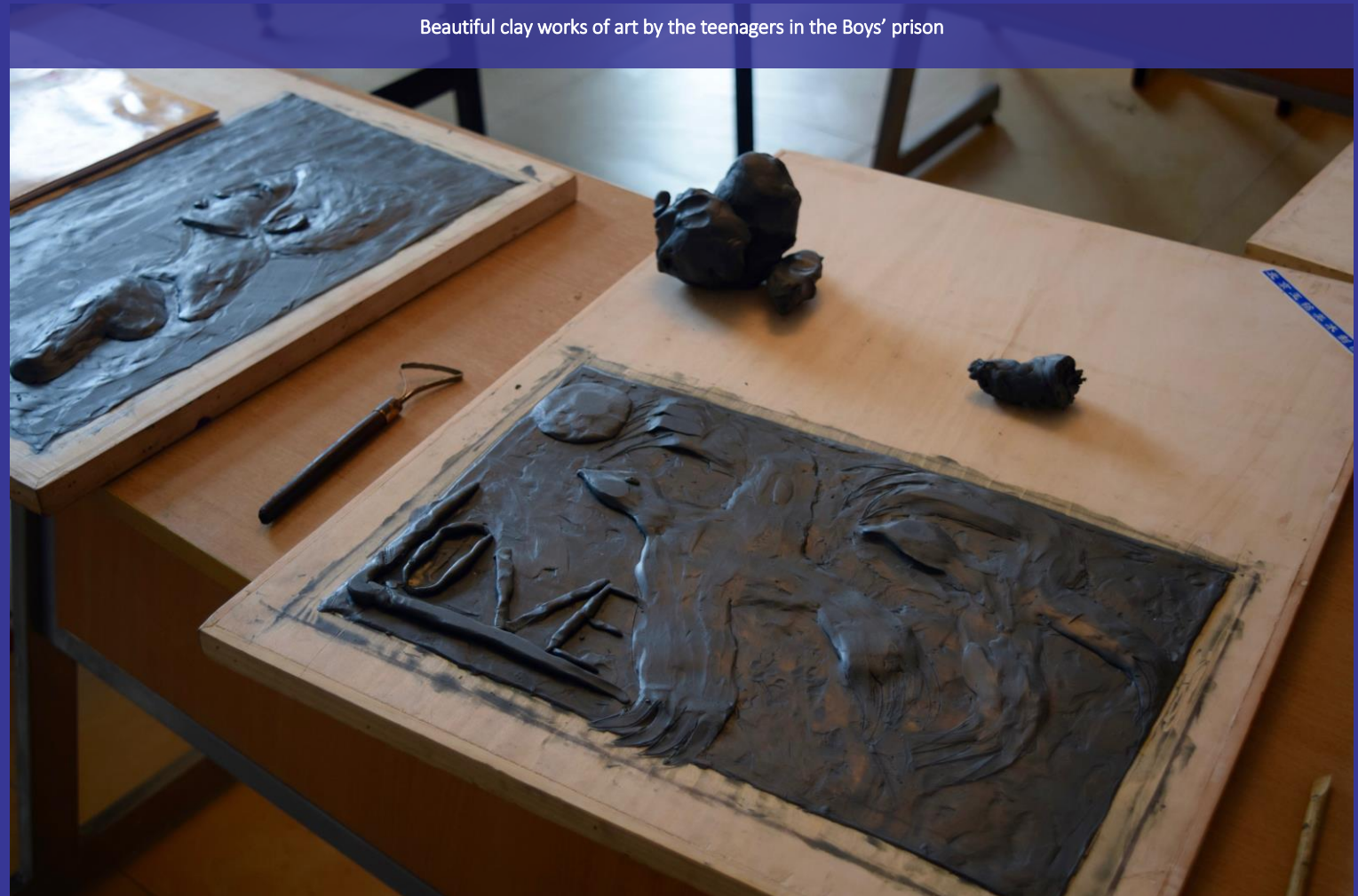
This year all fourteen students who were resident at the boys' prison participated in art lessons.

Lessons ran twice a week during January but had to be put on hold until August whilst the prison relocated to a new site outside of the city. In August a famous Mongolian Artist, Odgarig, led a one-month course focusing on pencil drawing. During this time the boys learnt about how to create a range of textures and realistic looking artwork using different grades of graphite pencil. Following this programme, professional Artist, Tsolmonkhuu, began working two afternoons a week at the prison, teaching the boys how to connect with their imaginations and express their creative selves through a variety of mediums such as acrylic, watercolour and clay.

As a result of the art lessons we have seen significant improvements in the teenagers' attitudes and behaviors. As they open up creatively and learn to express their thoughts and feelings through art, the boys' have become more calm and patient, and have developed in confidence and self belief.

For these young men, many of who have come from backgrounds characterised by poverty, hardship, and emotional pain, this dedicated time for self-expression is extremely valuable and can play an important role in the rehabilitation process.

Through the lessons students have been able to discover new creative talents and learn about aspects of themselves they had never before known existed. This can be a liberating and empowering experience for the boys who as a result of the creative sessions often learn to channel and express difficult emotions in a constructive and healing way.





Art teacher, Tzolmonkhuu, helping one of the boys add detail to his work.

An example of this can be seen in the work of eighteen-year-old Enkhbayar, who out of all of the boys has served the longest sentence. He drew two pictures representing his desire for freedom and hopes for the future. The first piece depicted a half open door. On one side it was grey and dark with the door casting a heavy shadow on the floor. On the other side bright light was shining through and delicate flowers growing in the distance. He described how his picture conveyed what he wanted life to feel like when he left the prison; filled with light energy, positivity and happiness. He wanted to leave any darkness behind him and move towards a bright and productive future. In the second piece he drew a fence with beautiful, brightly coloured birds flying over it. Enkhbayar explained how he longed for that same freedom; to be able to spread his wings and fly over the prison wall, returning to his home.

The following section has been written by the Boys' Prison Head Instructor Tungalag Damdinsuren:

The art lessons allow students to have an appropriate and effective outlet, uncover their talents, and gain a working knowledge of fine arts. Furthermore, art has the value of influencing personal development and granting an enlightened worldview.

At the onset, students have a tendency to use crude language and lack interest in their own lives. Art can greatly influence a person's creativity, compassion, and kindness for the better. In particular, learning how to draw not only gives students the chance to improve their skills but also gives the advantages to express themselves to others, gain faith to lead their lives, establish a sense of self-confidence, increase creativity, obtain a sense of aesthetics, and improve relations between students.

The creations the boys display are a clear reminder that within each troubled youth lies the heart of a pure and innocent child. Through art and creative self-expression we are able to rekindle this part of them that has very often been lost in a troubled childhood.

When students are questioned on their approach to art classes, a common response is, "I may be imprisoned, but when I paint – I feel free." The art programme grants students the gift of enjoying an innate sense of freedom that all creatures are born with.

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Child Sponsorship Programme

Our Child Sponsorship Programme provides support for children and their families who live in extreme poverty and hardship. Our programme is a lifeline for many families, offering them the financial means to eat, keep warm and for the children to go to school. In addition to this financial help our social work team works closely with each and every family, supporting them emotionally and offering opportunities such as workshops and seminars to encourage their personal development.

The art workshops form part of this additional yet valuable support by providing children who have no access to artistic materials the opportunity to express themselves creatively.

With thanks to the support of ArtiCour Gallery this year we were able to conduct our monthly child sponsorship art workshops in one of Ulaanbaatar's main galleries. The sessions are led by one of the gallery's professional teachers and provide an opportunity for our children to explore their imaginations, have fun and make new friends. They also allow them to be in a new environment, surrounded by exciting, thought-provoking works of art to inspire their creative minds.



An art workshop at the ArtiCour Gallery with children from our Child Sponsorship Programme

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'Lucky' the cat, made in one of our craft workshops

We believe that it is through exposing our children to new ideas, experiences and people that we help them to discover their desires and capabilities and see beyond their often limiting and difficult circumstances. This plays a fundamental role in helping our young people to break the cycle of poverty for good.

Children who take part in the workshops learn how to use a range of artistic mediums such as pencil, acrylic, watercolour, and gouache. The workshops are advertised to our children on sponsorship distribution days and are open to anyone who has an interest in art. Each workshop lasts between 2-3 hours and has an average attendance of fifteen children.

When we asked one of our teenage boys what he thought of the class he said, 'It was brilliant! I had a great time and loved looking at the beautiful pieces of art hanging from the walls. I have never been to a gallery before so it was a very special experience for me and has given me lots of interesting ideas. I can't wait until next time.'

Crafts

This year we were happy to be able to introduce craft classes to our Arts & Music Programme. Classes take place in our office and last between 2-3 hours each with an average attendance of ten children. The lessons are led by two teachers from the 'White Rabbit Group' who have taught the children a wide range of craft techniques such as sewing, stuffing, beading and following patterns.

The children love attending the creative sessions, which usually take place every two weeks. The children have produced a variety of beautiful and well-designed crafts such as decorative gers (traditional Mongolian felt tents), fluffy sheep, cushions, fish and felt bags. One of their favorite activities was making little cats, which they adorned with sequins, ribbons and beads. The cats were given as gifts to members of our Noble Challenge, accompanied by short letters the children attached saying the cats' names and descriptions about their personalities. One little girl wrote 'My name is lucky and I want to travel the world. Wherever you take me I will bring you luck and happiness and I will help to make all of your dreams come true!'

The craft classes have been a wonderful addition to our programme and have enabled our children to become more patient, focused and better at listening and following instructions. They have also been fun and rewarding and have no doubt created many happy childhood memories that our children will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

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Our children love their craft classes, which were introduced to our Arts & Music programme in 2016. Here is a group photo of our children with the 'White Rabbit Group' teachers, Olga and Olga, after making felt Raccoons.



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Music

Music has the unique ability to connect with and to heal aspects of the soul. It fuels and inspires the mind, stirs emotions, relieves anxieties and creates memories that we carry with us through life. The magical and reviving capabilities of music is a belief that Christina Noble herself shares, describing many lonely and desperate times as a child where music and singing were her only forms of escape and connection to a world beyond her own horrific daily reality.

At the Blue Skies Ger Village our professional music teacher, Gonchig, works three days a week helping our children to learn a variety of instruments including the drums, guitar and piano. He also leads group singing lessons with all of our children in preparation for special events such as concerts, visitors and birthdays, and conducts weekly choir classes with ten of our youngest children aged seven or below. Our little ones love their singing lessons and always attend with great excitement and enthusiasm. The lessons have helped them to grow in confidence and feel part of the ger village community; something that is especially important for any of our new younger arrivals who at first can feel unsettled and isolated from the other children.

This year fourteen children have attended lessons three times a week to learn the piano; four children have attended lessons twice a week to learn the guitar; and two children have attended lessons once a week to learn the drums. Classes are open to all of our children and at certain points throughout the year everyone has been involved in the music project, however these twenty children have shown particular dedication to becoming accomplished musicians and therefore commit to attending lessons on a regular basis.

The children love learning to play the different instruments and have quickly developed their skills with persistent practice. It is always clear to see their progression at our celebratory events when the children perform what they have learnt with pride and confidence.



Our children love to perform what they have been learning at special celebrations and events.

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During the year our young people have also had opportunities to develop their talents at playing traditional Mongolian instruments such as the 'Morin Khuur', also known as the horsehead fiddle, and the 'Yatag', the Mongolian half tube zither. By incorporating these traditional instruments into the music programme we have helped to maintain and support our young people's cultural identity and heritage connections; a fundamental part of the Christina Noble Children's Foundation's philosophy.



Our children from the Blue Skies Ger Village performing in their choir

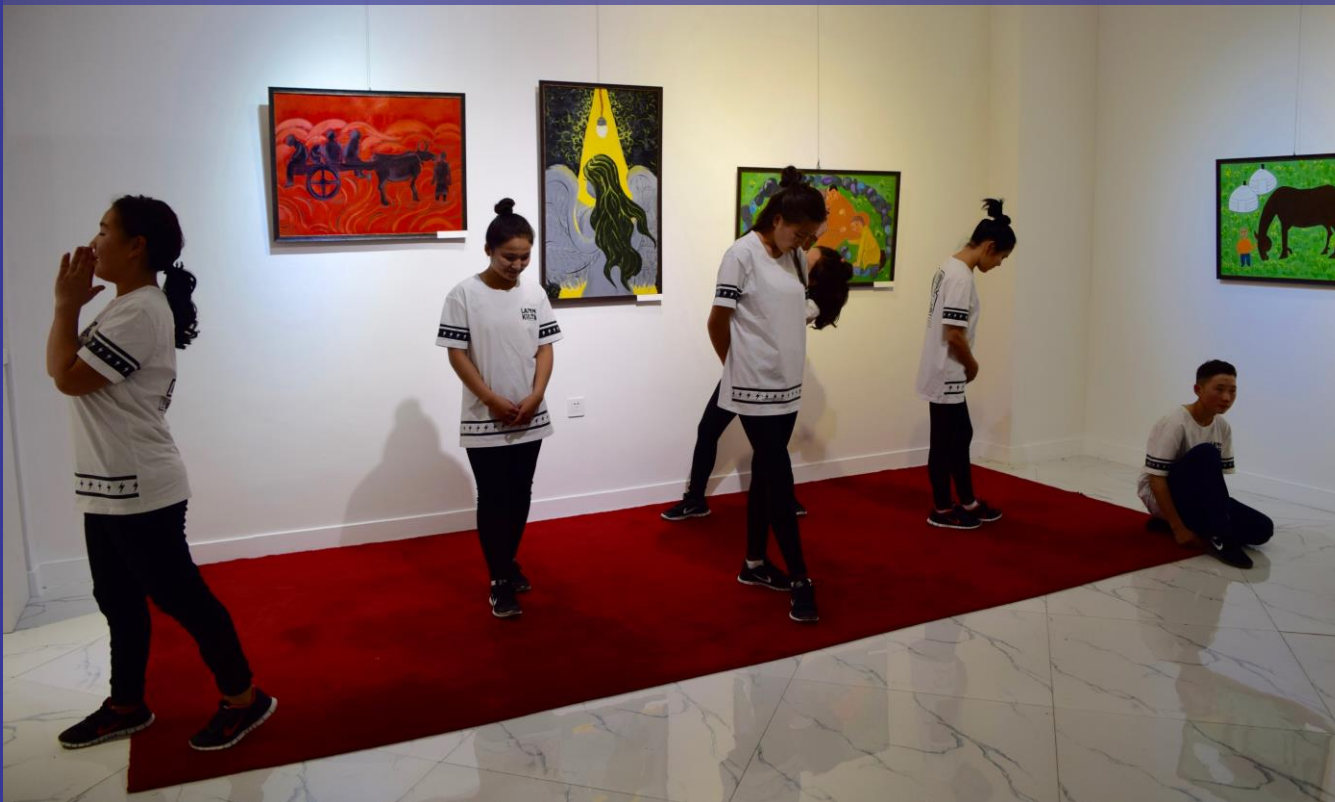
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Dance

At the Foundation we believe in the power of dance and the wide-reaching benefits it can have for our children. Dance offers a valuable means to explore and communicate emotions, increase self-confidence and enhance social skills. It is also highly physical and provides a fun and effective way for our children to improve their overall health and fitness.

For a number of years our children had expressed a keen interest in learning street dance and in 2015 we were able to fulfill their wishes after building a partnership with one of Mongolia's most prestigious Hip Hop dancers, Tuuguu – Saruultugs. Since then ten of our older children have attended weekly dance classes at Tuuguu's 'Aim4r Dance studio', a professional street dance facility located in the centre of Ulaanbaatar. Five children from our Child Sponsorship Programme were also selected to join the class and have since integrated with our young people from the ger village to form a dedicated and talented dance group.

Our children performed two captivating and innovative street dance routines at our recent art exhibition.



As the classes are held outside the ger village at a studio in the city, they have also helped our children to become more independent and familiar with urban life. Generally the children are required to find their own transport to the city and ensure that they manage their time in such a way that they are always punctual and prepared for their lesson. In order for the Foundation to fulfill our responsibility of care to the children, providing opportunities such as this are essential and help to prepare our young people for independent adult life. We wish to continue lessons in 2017 and are excited to watch the children develop their skills and grow in confidence.

In April this year we extended our dance programme to the younger children living at the ger village by hiring a dance teacher from Aim4r Dance studio to come out to our children's home on Saturdays. Twenty children initially attended the lessons but numbers have since reduced to ten students who are highly committed and passionate about learning street dance. In a short space of time they have picked up basic moves and can competently perform impressive street dance routines.

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In August twenty-six visitors taking part in our Noble Challenge came to the village to meet the children, learn about our projects, and watch a special concert. During the concert the challengers were left inspired by the young group's performance and their notable confidence, charisma and skill. It was clear for everyone to see the positive impact the classes were having and the feelings of pride and self belief dance had helped to develop within our children.

In addition to learning street dance, our children have also had the opportunity throughout the year to develop their skills in traditional Mongolian dance. This is with thanks to our ger village psychotherapist, Nomin-Erdene, who as a talented dancer herself has been able to work with our young people to help them learn this unique art form. Four of our older girls expressed particular interest in the classes and have stunned audiences at many events this year with their beautiful performances



Our younger children have loved the addition of street dance classes at the ger village and have left many people stunned by their impressive performances.

Special events and performances



Noble Challenge Visit: In September twenty-four visitors taking part in the Noble Challenge arrived at our Blue Skies Ger Village. During their visit they enjoyed a special concert by our children from the Child Sponsorship Programme and those living at the village. The concert included a variety of acts such as traditional and contemporary dance and music, singing, taekwondo and a short play. Following this the challenges took part in collaborative classes with the children like art, music and dance. It was an incredibly heart-warming day, which left the challenges feeling inspired and impressed by the talented, confident and creative children we support.



Photography Art Workshop: Ten of our ger village children participated in a two-day photography workshop led by talented UK photographer Billy Macrae. During the sessions our young people gained a basic understanding about how to use a digital camera, composition, lighting and how to take imaginative and unique photographs.



Children's Day Celebration: To mark this year's Children's Day our talented young people put on a special concert performing a variety of dance and music acts. As always it was a joy to see our children take to the stage with such confidence and talent to showcase what they had been learning in their extra-curricular activities. The performances left all of our team filled with pride about the beautiful young people we care for.



Talent Show: Our young people from the ger village took part in Ulaanbaatar's talent show, performing a variety of acts such as dance and taekwondo. This was a great opportunity for our children to build confidence and develop their sense of team spirit. Everyone was impressed by their commitment and self-discipline when preparing for the event, which paid off with some great performances and high scores by the judges.



Collaborative Art Workshop at the Boys' Prison: Every year, a group of students from the Chinese International School (CIS) in Hong Kong, visit the students in the boys' prison. The event is dedicated to promoting friendship and kinship between teenagers from two very different walks of life. During the visit the teenagers came together to take part in a collaborative art workshop, creating paintings with each other based on topics such as "friendship" and "future dreams".



American Art Auction: Ten pieces of powerful artwork created by our children from the ger village, sponsorship programme, and boys' prison were sent to America to be part of a CNCF fundraising event. All of their artwork was sold with profits going into our children's personal savings accounts to be used towards their further education and helping them to realise their life ambitions.



Gallery Visits: Our children visited galleries in Ulaanbaatar to learn about different artists, styles and genres. The children enjoyed looking at the pieces of art and discussing with their teacher how the work made them think and feel. The children left feeling inspired and full of ideas about what they wanted to convey in their own artwork.



Art Exhibition: In October four of our ger village children who had been attending advanced art classes for seven months, impressed and inspired us all with an incredible art exhibition showcasing their large collection of stunning work. The event was arranged in partnership with the NGO 'Amirlakhuin Soyombo' who operate to help disadvantaged children in the Songino Khaikhan district. Many government officials, charitable organisations and members of the general public attended the event and were left mesmerised by the deeply meaningful and striking works of art. During the opening evening some of our other children performed traditional and contemporary music and dance, further contributing to the magnificent display of creativity and talent. The exhibition was a dream come true for these four children and a memory that they will always cherish. We are all so proud of their achievement and the beautiful, talented young people they are.





Day Care Mural: With thanks to the support of the artists at ArtiCour, a magical scene of animals, letters, numbers, rainbows and more was painted onto the wall in our Day Care Centre. Our little ones love the bright and beautiful mural which for now and many more years to come will spark our children's imaginations and support their learning.



Designing Christmas Cards: Our children from the ger village and Child Sponsorship Programme had lots of fun designing special Christmas images for our 2016 CNCF Christmas cards. Everyone was very excited to get involved and created their pieces with great focus and attention to detail, inspired by the opportunity to have their card sent around the world. The finished artwork was beautiful and combined the essence of a western Christmas with aspects of Mongolian culture.



Summer Camp Performance: This year twenty of our children from the ger village were specially selected to perform at the opening ceremony of a newly built summer camp. They were joined by children from a centre in Inner Mongolia, who also performed during the event. Our children's music and dance performances were a highlight of the ceremony, bringing a positive and uplifting energy to the new camp.

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OUR STORIES

Boys' Prison Student – Batbayar's Story



Seventeen-year-old Batbayar was sent to the boys' prison at the beginning of 2016. Both of his parents are herders, and Batbayar grew up in the northern part of the Mongolian countryside living off the land with his mother and father. Like many other boys his age, Batbayar left school when he was fifteen-years-old to focus on pursuing a nomadic lifestyle – raising livestock and moving with the seasons.

As an impressionable teenager, living with limited financial means and more than ever being influenced by the values of a growing consumer culture, Batbayar got involved with a group of other young men and started committing petty crimes. His behaviour got increasingly worse and eventually Batbayar was arrested after promising the local people that he would sell their motorbikes for a good profit, but instead kept the money for himself and never returned to the village.

When he arrived at the prison, Batbayar was extremely difficult and often acted in a confrontational and aggressive manner with the staff and other boys. He lost interest in activities quickly, was disorganised and exhibited an uninspired and lethargic attitude. It was clear to see that he was also depressed and feeling extremely worried about the prospect of serving his two-and-a-half year sentence.

When Batbayar first started art lessons he would make up excuses to leave the room and when he was not allowed, would become angry and despondent. While the other boys were focused on their work, Batbayar would just scribble or try to distract the other students. Our art teacher Tsolmonkhuu remained patient with Batbayar and continued to encourage and support him despite his difficult attitude. He didn't get angry but instead tried to communicate with Batbayar and guide him towards expressing his frustrations through art.

In a relatively short space of time Tsolmonkhuu and the other members of staff began to see big improvements in his behaviour and overall outlook on life. Batbayar started to engage in the art lessons, which soon became the highlight to his weekly schedule. He now attends each lesson with enthusiasm, focus and commitment to the subject, and holds a new ambition to become a skilled architect. With this newfound passion, Batbayar's spirit has lifted and he is now a calm and contributing member of the prison community.

Tsolmonkhuu is confident that Batbayar can fulfil his dream and will continue to work with him closely to support his personal and artistic development. *"Batbayar shows great talent as an artist and I am sure that with enough determination he has the capability to achieve his goals. We are all very proud of Batbayar's growth and look forward to watching as he continues to develop into a mature, fulfilled and responsible man".* – Tsolmonkhuu.

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Expression Through Dance – Deegii’s Story

Deegii is eighteen-years-old. Her mother left her and her two siblings in 2005. Sadly she was heavily dependent on alcohol and unable to look after her three small daughters. With few options of where to go the children went to live with their elderly grandfather Altan. Altan lived alone in incredibly squalid and poverty-stricken conditions in a ger located on the outskirts of the city. Despite his best efforts, in 2008 their grandfather had no choice but to bring the three children to our Blue Skies Ger Village. Tired and suffering from ill health, Altan was unable to continue to support his grandchildren.

With time the siblings settled into ger village life and became well loved and respected members of the community. From the beginning Deegii exuded charisma and quickly became a prominent character at the village. She has always been naturally talented, however despite appearing confident on the surface those close to her know that she used to lack self-belief, was highly self-conscious and found it difficult expressing her emotions to others.

In 2015, Deegii, along with ten of our other ger village children, began street dance lessons at the country’s top studio. This had always been a dream of hers, which thanks to the sponsorship of the Sovereign Art Foundation and CNCF’s cooperation with Aim4r Dance studio, Deegii was able to realise.

Since the beginning she has never missed a class and attends each week on time, with passion and commitment to becoming a professional dancer. Deegii’s teachers have been highly impressed by her agility and ability to pick up complex routines in a short space of time. What has provoked even greater attention however, is Deegii’s captivating energy, radiating confidence and stunning beauty, which shines out of her every performance.



Street dance class inside the Aim4r Dance studio

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Deegii truly is a star, who through learning this art form has grown into her own skin and learnt how to express herself with confidence and pride. Her talents in this area have also earned her tremendous respect amongst her peers at school and has allowed her to rise above the often unavoidable stigma in Mongolia that comes from living in a children's home.

We are all so proud of Deegii and the talented, beautiful and determined young woman she has become. We look forward to watching her continue to grow as a dancer, bringing happiness and inspiration into the lives of those who watch her perform.

Using Art To Heal Trauma – Amaraa's Story

Amaraa was only three-years-old when she was found living on the streets with her five older brothers. Up until then her childhood had been shaped by abuse, neglect and loneliness; she had never known unconditional love and protection. Both of her parents were heavy alcoholics and unable to provide any sort of stability for their children. As a result Amaraa and her brothers grew up fending for themselves, living in-between different relatives' homes and in makeshift shelters on the city streets; during this time Amaraa was a victim of intrafamilial sexual abuse. This traumatic experience left Amaraa feeling isolated, fearful and untrusting of the world around her.

After being discovered by the local authorities Amaraa was sent with her brothers to live at our Blue Skies Ger Village. When she arrived it was clear to see the psychological effects that had been caused by the hardship she had suffered in her early years. Her nervous look and withdrawn demeanor were symptomatic of a childhood experience fraught with neglect, abuse and uncertainty. For a long time Amaraa kept herself to herself, preferring to spend time alone rather than interact with the other children and staff. She had a beautiful kind heart but found it difficult to express her thoughts and feelings to others and so would often get very angry and upset.

In 2014 Amaraa started attending art therapy sessions with our onsite psychotherapist, Nomin-Erdene. Although Amaraa had received previous psychological support, there had been little improvement in her behavior and she had never opened up about her past experiences.

When Amaraa first began to express her inner life through art she would mainly use dark colours, and her pictures felt very heavy and sad. Over time her drawings have changed significantly and she is now creating much happier images, choosing more uplifting and brighter shades. Amaraa has also learnt how to express her anger through art and has become much calmer and more centered as a result. She has her own painting



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journal, which she uses most days to express how she is feeling. Recently Amaraa said 'Everything feels so calm and nice when I am painting, like nothing else exists.'

It has been clear for everyone at the Ger Village to see the changes taking place within Amaraa since she began art therapy. Day-by-day she becomes more open and trusting in those around her; she now enjoys playing with the other children and confidently initiates conversations with the staff. She has also started learning to play the piano, which is helping her to build confidence, and similar to visual art is an avenue for Amaraa to channel her emotions in a positive and therapeutic way.

Amaraa is now experiencing a happy and secure childhood: she is safe, unconditionally loved, and respected as an individual with her own unique needs. Through art and music she has been able to explore her internal landscape and begin to heal from the deep-rooted trauma created by her horrific previous experiences. With continued support we are confident that Amaraa can go on to lead an independent and happy life, where she is able to build meaningful relationships with others and share her beautiful kind heart with those who will cherish it.

The beautiful Mongolian landscape inspires creativity and imagination



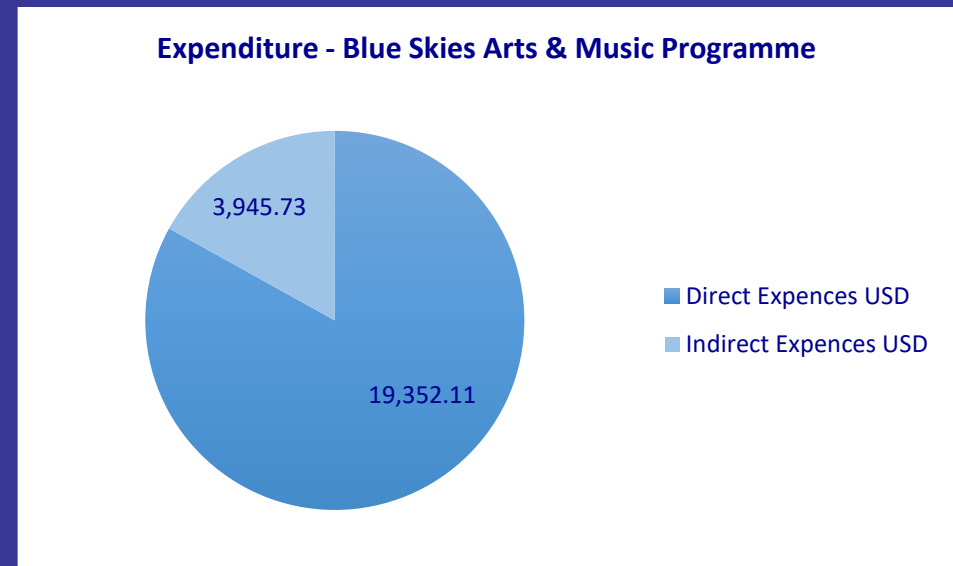
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FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

The direct cost of the Blue Skies Arts Music Programme is \$19,352.11 USD. This includes project staff salaries, supplies, musical instruments and equipment, room rental, and competition prizes.

The indirect cost of the programme is \$3,945.73 . This includes office rent and utilities, administration staff salaries and various other resources shared by multiple projects.

The Sovereign Art Foundation has funded the project since 2011.



It is with thanks to the Sovereign Art Foundation and their truly meaningful funding of the Arts and Music Programme that we have been able to realise Christina's mission of giving the children within our care an emotionally rich, happy and fulfilled childhood. By exposing our young people to creative experiences, self-expression and personal exploration we help them to build a strong and beautiful platform from which their lives can freely flourish.



“First you feed a child’s stomach, then you feed their spirit.” – Christina Noble

Each of us is only one person. But by joining all the ones together, we can accomplish greatness. If you or your organisation is interested in supporting us in 2017/2018 please contact our Foundation. It is only through the love, care and generosity of others that we are able to continue our work with some of the world’s most vulnerable children.

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