

Connecting urban and rural areas: the role and impact of student volunteers in the Blue Envelope Letters and Pen Pals Programme

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Abstract: This paper provides an in-depth discussion of the role of university student volunteers in the Blue Envelope Letter Pen Pal Programme in helping rural children's mental health and its social impact. By establishing long-term letter exchanges with rural children, the project aims to provide continuous psychological support and promote their positive outlook on life and learning motivation, so as to effectively deal with psychological problems such as loneliness, low self-esteem and academic pressure faced by rural children. The study found that such programmes not only had a positive impact on the children's personal growth and psychological health, but also brought growth and satisfaction to the university student volunteers, enhancing their communication skills, empathy and sense of social responsibility. However, challenges such as resource allocation, volunteer recruitment and training, and supervision and evaluation are also faced during the implementation of the programme. The article concludes with a series of countermeasures and recommendations to overcome the existing challenges, expand the project's reach, further promote in-depth communication and understanding between urban and rural areas, and contribute to the long-term development of rural children and the overall harmony and progress of society.

Key words: urban-rural connectivity; university student volunteers; letter and pen pal programme; cultural exchanges; sharing of educational resources

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and significance of the study

In the midst of rapid social change and urbanization, rural areas face many challenges, one of which is the mental health of rural children. With the changes in family structure and the influence of the social environment, rural children often face problems of mental health and lack of care. This not only affects their personal growth, but also poses a challenge to the harmonious development of society. Therefore, exploring effective psychological support methods is of great significance in improving the mental health of rural children and promoting rural revitalization.

1.2 Status and challenges of psychological support for rural children

Rural children are often at a disadvantage in terms of psychological care and educational support due to their remote geographical location, relative lack of educational resources, and their parents being away from home all year round. They may face multiple psychological problems such as loneliness, low self-esteem and academic pressure. At present, although

the government and social organisations have begun to pay attention and take measures, there are still many challenges in practice, such as the lack of professional psychological support personnel and the inadequacy of effective interventions.

1.3 Overview of the Pen Pal Programme

Against this background, the Blue Envelope Village Children's Letter Writing Programme was born. The programme systematically trains university student volunteers to establish one-to-one correspondence with rural children. This stable exchange, which lasts for at least one and a half years, not only provides the rural children with continuous attention and psychological support, but also helps them to establish a positive outlook on life and role models, thus effectively reducing the occurrence of problematic behaviours and guiding them to grow up healthily and happily.

1.4 Purpose of the study and questions

The purpose of this study is to explore in depth the role and impact of the Blue Envelope Letters and Pen Pals Programme in psychological support for rural children. It is hoped to provide a deeper understanding and more effective strategic recommendations for psychological help for rural children.

1.5 Study on the mental health of rural children

The unique mental health challenges faced by rural children have been noted in several studies. These children may be more likely to experience loneliness, anxiety, and depression due to factors such as geographic isolation, limited educational resources, inadequate economic conditions, and parents working outside the home [1]. Research suggests that rural children often have less well-developed mental health support systems than urban areas, which exacerbates the mental health challenges they face [2]. Furthermore, awareness of and interventions for rural children's mental health issues remains a lesser-attended area in practice.

1.6 The role of volunteering in psychological support

Volunteering as a form of social support plays an important role in providing psychological help and creating positive social connections. Research has shown that the support provided by volunteers can enhance recipients' sense of social belonging and reduce loneliness and social isolation [3]. For rural children in particular, the relationships established with volunteers not only provide emotional support, but also promote the development of their social skills and self-perception [4]. Therefore, volunteering plays an indispensable role in psychological support for rural children.

1.7 Psychological effects of epistolary communication

As a traditional and deeply rooted form of communication, epistolary communication has a significant positive impact on enhancing the psychological well-being of individuals. Research has shown that letter exchange promotes deep emotional expression and understanding and helps to alleviate anxiety and depression [5]. For rural children, correspondence with distant friends is not only a novel experience, but also opens a window to the outside world, thus enhancing their self-esteem and self-efficacy [6].

1.8 Case studies of domestic and international projects

Similar pen pal programmes exist globally. For example, the United Nations Pen Pal Programme promotes cross-cultural understanding and emotional support by connecting children from different backgrounds. In China, there is also a programme like "Blue Envelope", which connects urban volunteers with rural children through letter exchanges, effectively improving children's mental health and learning motivation. These cases show that the interpersonal connections established through letter exchanges can provide strong psychological support for rural children, and at the same time bring growth and satisfaction to the volunteers.

In summary, through in-depth analyses of the challenges of rural children's mental health, the role of volunteering, the psychological effects of letter exchange, and the successful cases of related projects both at home and abroad, we can

understand the value and potential of the Blue Envelope Project in a more comprehensive way [7]. With theoretical support, it is conducive to helping us explore the role of college student volunteers in psychological support and how this innovative project can promote in-depth communication and understanding between urban and rural areas.

2 Role analysis of university student volunteers

2.1 The role of volunteers

University student volunteers play the dual role of bridge and mentor in the Blue Envelope Programme. As bridges, they connect the worlds of the city and the countryside, passing on information, knowledge and emotions through the exchange of letters. As mentors, they pass on life skills, learning methods and emotional support to the children in the countryside through letters [8], helping them to broaden their horizons and stimulate their interest in learning and the future. This role orientation not only emphasises the role of volunteers in knowledge transfer and emotional support, but also reflects their importance in promoting social integration and understanding.

2.2 Models of interaction between volunteers and village children

Interaction between university student volunteers and village children takes place primarily through correspondence, a mode of communication that is uniquely personal and thoughtful. Letters allow both parties to take time to reflect in their responses, thus enabling deeper expression of thoughts and feelings. In addition, the mode of interaction may evolve into regular video calls or face-to-face meetings after the correspondence has ended in order to strengthen the bond. Through such interactions, volunteers are able to provide personalized support and encouragement based on the child's interests and needs.

2.3 The impact of volunteers on the psychological development of rural children

University student volunteers have had a positive impact on the psychological development of village children. Firstly, regular exchange of letters helped the children to feel cared for and valued, which was crucial for improving their self-esteem and self-confidence. Secondly, by sharing personal experiences and words of encouragement, volunteers motivate village children to face difficulties and challenges in life, which develops their resilience [9]. Finally, by providing learning resources and guidance, volunteers can also help children improve their academic performance, which further promotes their mental health and personal growth.

2.4 Volunteers' own gains and growth

University student volunteers participating in the Blue Envelope Programme also gained valuable personal growth and rewards. Through interaction with rural children, volunteers enhance their communication skills, empathy and sense of social responsibility. The experience has led to a deeper understanding of the living conditions and challenges in rural communities, which in turn has led to a greater awareness of social justice and inclusiveness. In addition, the process was also a journey of self-reflection, allowing the volunteers to realize the potential of their individual actions to contribute to social change, as well as providing them with new perspectives and inspiration for their career planning and personal development [10].

Through analysis, we can see that college student volunteers play a crucial role in the Blue Envelope Letters and Pen Pals programme, not only positively impacting the psychological development of rural children, but also achieving their own growth and development. This mutually beneficial mode of interaction provides a new way for cultural exchange and understanding between urban and rural areas, demonstrating the important value of volunteerism in social development.

3 Social impact of the project

3.1 Challenges in the operation of the project

The Blue Envelope Project faces multiple challenges in its implementation, including resource allocation, volunteer

recruitment and training, and project monitoring and evaluation. Resource constraints may affect the scope and quality of the project, while the continuous recruitment and effective training of volunteers are key factors in ensuring the success of the project. In addition, a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanism is required to ensure the quality and impact of project activities.

3.2 Communication barriers between volunteers and children

Although letter exchanges provide an in-depth form of communication, communication barriers may still exist between volunteers and village children. These barriers may stem from cultural differences, differences in language expression skills or a lack of understanding of each other's living environment. These differences may lead to misunderstanding or inaccurate conveyance of information, affecting the effectiveness of communication between the two parties.

3.3 Sustainability and sustainable development issues

The long-term success of any volunteer programme depends on its sustainability. For the Blue Envelope Project, challenges include maintaining active volunteer participation, keeping funding sources stable, and adapting and updating project content over time to keep it relevant and engaging. In addition, projects need to find their place in a changing social environment and ensure that their long-term goals are aligned with community needs.

3.4 Responses and recommendations

Enhance resource allocation and fundraising strategies: Identify new sources of funding for projects and optimize resource allocation through partnerships with government agencies, private enterprises and NGOs.

Establish effective volunteer training and support systems: Develop comprehensive training programmes covering communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and mental health basics, while providing ongoing support and feedback mechanisms.

Strengthening project monitoring and evaluation: Implementing regular project evaluation, including feedback from participants, effectiveness of project activities and social impact, so as to make timely adjustments to strategies.

Overcoming communication barriers: Adopting a variety of communication methods and tools, such as videoconferencing and online exchange platforms, to compensate for the limitations of letter exchange and enhance mutual understanding.

Ensure the sustainability of the project: Establish a diversified funding model, including donations, government funding and a social enterprise model, to ensure the long-term operation of the project. At the same time, encourage volunteers to participate in project decision-making to enhance their sense of belonging and responsibility.

With these countermeasures and suggestions, the Blue Envelope Project can be sustained and achieve its long-term goal, so as to promote a deeper understanding and connection between urban and rural areas through letter exchanges, while bringing about positive changes for both rural children and university student volunteers.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Project summary and evaluation

The Blue Envelope Project builds a unique bridge of communication by connecting university student volunteers with village children, and promoting cultural exchange and understanding between urban and rural areas. The implementation of the project has had a positive impact on the psychological health of the rural children, improving their self-esteem, self-confidence and motivation to learn. At the same time, university student volunteers also gained valuable personal growth experience and enhanced their sense of social responsibility and empathy through participating in the project. In addition, the project has had a positive impact on promoting the development of the volunteer service system and raising social

awareness of rural children's mental health issues.

4.2 Long-term impact of psychological support for rural children

The Blue Envelope Programme not only provides immediate psychological support and educational resources to rural children, but also has a profound impact on their long-term development. By enhancing rural children's self-awareness, social skills and interest in learning, the project lays a solid foundation for their future education and career paths. In addition, by enhancing understanding and respect between urban and rural areas, the project is also important in promoting overall social harmony and progress. In the long run, the Blue Envelope Project and similar psychological support initiatives are expected to become an important tool for improving the well-being of rural children and promoting social equity.

In conclusion, the Blue Envelope Project has demonstrated significant social value and impact in promoting cultural exchanges between urban and rural areas, enhancing the mental health of rural children and promoting the development of the volunteer service system through its innovative letter and pen pal model. Future efforts should focus on overcoming the challenges in the operation of the project and expanding its scope of influence in order to achieve more extensive and far-reaching social benefits.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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