Building community with China

Interest is stirring from the other side of the world in The Arc’s work; China is looking at CLASS/The Arc of Greater Lawrence.

Ms. Lü Fei, the director of the Able Development Institute (ADI) in Beijing, a supportive non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to assisting people with disabilities, spent 30 days in the Merrimack Valley, observing several agencies, asking questions and educating everyone in those circles about what life is like in China.

For Ms. Lü’s base of operations, The Arc of Massachusetts and the National Committee on United States-China Relations (NCUSCR) selected CLASS/The Arc of Greater Lawrence. As a Professional Fellow in the National Committee’s program on NGO capacity building, she went to work daily at CLASS headquarters in Lawrence and met as many people as she could to understand what services our federal and state governments offer.

“The visit from Ms. Lü was an honor for CLASS and we are so proud to have been selected by The Arc of Massachusetts and NCUSCR as the agency to show what we do and host her stay,” said CLASS President and CEO Bob Harris. “We embraced the opportunity for her to shadow staff at CLASS and attend meetings with other agencies and nonprofits. We enjoyed sharing insights into how American organizations supporting people with disabilities function on operational and management levels.

“This cross-cultural exchange was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for everybody at CLASS and The Arc of Greater Lawrence,” he said, “and we are grateful The Arc of Massachusetts recommended us as hosts.”

During her fellowship placement, Ms. Lü wanted to learn from CLASS innovative ways that people with disabilities become engaged as active members of their communities and land jobs. She and her colleagues work to change attitudes in China and improve awareness and understanding of what people with disabilities are capable of doing, but it’s been challenging. Ms. Lü was particularly interested in how American nonprofits operate and how individuals with disabilities receive direct financial support.

“It was difficult for her to grasp how ‘the money follows the person,’” said Robin Ellington, director of marketing at CLASS. “In China, the government funds only some of the NGOs and it’s up to the families and individuals to find the right services, which are not available everywhere.

“Lü Fei was a guest in my home for the entire program visit,” she continued. “For communications at work and at home, we relied on an app, SayHi, to hurdle the language barrier and she schooled my family on Chinese culture and Mandarin. She also turned my adult son into a noodle master, which we continue to enjoy and thank her for. She is a joy to be around, extremely charismatic and optimistic.”

Lü Fei spent most of her time at CLASS, shadowing Day Hab and Community Based Day Services programs in Lawrence and Wilmington, but also had meetings set up for her with Leo Sarkissian, Executive Director of The Arc of Massachusetts; the Department of Developmental Services; Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission; Northeast Independent Living Program; and Fidelity House, at one of their residences in Haverhill. She also visited a CLASS group employment site, Joe Fish restaurant, and met with CLASS individuals working with community partners, including Ironstone Farm Challenge Unlimited horseback riding therapy, Express Yourself art classes, the Andover/North Andover YMCA, and the CLASS Healthy Balance fitness program designed for youth with disabilities at Andover High School, with Merrimack College student volunteers.

“She went to work with me every day. I planned out her 30 days and we attended all those meetings together,” Ellington said. “We commuted, worked and went home to dinner every day, everything together, every day, all day. Then all of a sudden the

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Minute Man Arc recently celebrated the opening of an accessible putting green. Designed to be accessible for all types of abilities, the putting green consists of six holes -- one “no fail” hole designed to build confidence and five progressively challenging holes.

“The accessible putting green project started with a simple idea and snowballed from there, picking up support along the way,” said Jean Goldsberry, CEO. “We are so happy to have this wonderful putting green here at our new location, and we are grateful for all the support from the Rotary Club of Concord, Spaulding Management and local benefactors who made this possible for us.”

“The Rotary Club of Concord has enjoyed taking individuals from Minute Man Arc to the driving range and putting green at Stone Meadow Golf in Lexington, but logistically we were unable to serve all adults at one time,” said Sharon Spaulding, President of the Rotary Club of Concord, MA. “Minute Man Arc wanted to build their own accessible putting green at their new location at 35 Forest Ridge Road and the Rotary thought this would be a great project to be involved in. Now with an accessible and ability friendly putting green, complete with benches for onlookers, the Rotary can help Minute Man Arc serve all of its participants.”

The project was made possible with support from The Rotary Club of Concord, Spaulding Management, Lenox, LoPresti Contracting, Northeast Synthetic Turf Company and private donors.

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30 days were up and she was gone. We communicate still by WeChat, but it’s just not the same. She’s an amazing person and I miss her very much.”

The NCUSCR is responsible for Chinese and Mongolian fellows’ work in the fields of legal aid, the environment, support for community building among marginalized groups (primarily LGBT people, women, children and youth, and the elderly), and philanthropy in their home countries. The Professional Fellows Program is generously funded by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Greater Waltham Arc receives grant from Music Drives Us

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singing,” Elizabeth said, when explaining what she likes about the music project.

“I really like playing an instrument,” Brian D. said, as he played the bongo drums.

In February, James will bring in equipment to create a recording studio at GWArc, and will record the ensemble’s music. A percussionist drummer who has worked with many well-known jazz musicians, James is donating his time and recording equipment to capture and mix the music, and will make a CD that GWArc can distribute to GWArc participants, family and friends, and staff members.

In addition to his music background, James has past experience as a case worker for individuals with disabilities and has worked with disadvantaged youth and other groups on similar recording projects. He enjoys working with GWArc participants because “their minds are open, they don’t have any inhibitions or restrictions with the music they create.”

Achieve with us.