

CNCF's Summer Night Clinic for Street Children

Mongolia, August 2004

Since 1997, CNCF Mongolia has operated a roaming night clinic during the long hard Mongolian winter for the street children of Ulaanbaatar. The night clinic is a huge "Unimog" which was kindly donated by Mercedes Benz Ireland seven years ago. Staff from the CNCF medical team travel the city's streets in the Unimog to provide emergency medical treatment, medical advice and food to the children who live in the manholes of the city's underground heating system.

This year, having identified an increasing need for the clinic among the street children, we decided to extend the night clinic into the summer months. The clinic started on a weekly trial basis at the beginning of June and it didn't take long for word to spread among the children. By the end of July over 60 children per night were coming to the clinic seeking medical assistance on health matters such as cuts, infections, scabies, STD's and other poverty-related conditions.



One indication of just how valuable the night clinic is for the street children, regardless of time of the year, came in early July when a 15 year old boy came onto the Unimog with a broken arm. The sole hospital in Ulaanbaatar providing free healthcare to people without money or health insurance had unfortunately run out of plaster cast. The boy was then refused treatment by the Accident and Emergency Hospital as he did not have the \$4 to pay for the cast. When his friends brought him to the night clinic a few

days later he was holding his arm up with just a piece of old shoelace tied around his neck and was clearly in a lot of pain.

CNCF staff took him straight to the Accident and Emergency Hospital where they paid the few dollars necessary for doctors to fix the boy's arm and put it in a plaster cast. For the first time in days the boy was able to smile. Now, with the night clinic running every week during the summer we can monitor the boy's progress and ensure that his arm heals properly.



Many other children have also benefited from the chance of medical care, food and a friendly, caring face. In late July a nine year old boy came to the clinic with huge infected sores on his feet. Medical staff were concerned that if it wasn't treated there and then, the ailment could cause serious health problems for the child. Before being treated, his feet needed to be thoroughly cleaned and so we brought him to our nearby Mother and Child drop in clinic where we washed his feet in the shower and were then able to treat the sores. His friends meanwhile splashed about in the sink making the most of a rare opportunity to have a wash!

The children are always full of gratitude for the care and assistance they receive on the night clinic and, every week, as the Unimog pulls up to the manholes, children coming running from all directions with huge smiles and shouts of "Sainuu" (hi). With continued funding support, we look forward to running the night clinic on a year round basis for the foreseeable future. □