

10 Years Later – A Success Story Created by the Swiss Community in China

On May 12, 2008, a terrible tremor shook the province of Sichuan and caused tremendous destruction and loss of lives. Many young children died as the earthquake took place during school hours and school buildings collapsed. To alleviate the devastating consequences of that massive tragedy, the Swiss Community in China decided to act, coordinate their efforts, and seek ways to support and help – one way was to build and establish a kindergarten in LongXing, Chengdu.



Evacuated children during earthquake

Exactly ten years later, on May 11, 2018, a delegation of the Swiss Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC) and SwissCham China as well as other Swiss and Chinese persons deeply involved with the kindergarten traveled to LongXing to commemorate the disastrous earthquake and to celebrate the successful and longstanding operation of the kindergarten – and the happiness it brought to so many young children.



The Swiss delegation headed by SCCC and SwissCham China

In the morning of May 11, the Swiss delegation – most participants arrived from Chongqing and were part of the SCCC's business delegation visiting several business parks throughout China – met at the Consulate General of Switzerland in Chengdu. Just to mention a few of the participants: it was both important and a great pleasure to have Markus Assfalg, Head Office for Economy and Labour Zurich,

and René Forster, President Swisscham Guangzhou, on board. Frank Eggmann, Consul General of Switzerland in Chengdu showed us the Consulate and explained its tasks and goals in Western China as well as some of the results he has already achieved for the Swiss business community within only two years. After a nice lunch – accompanied by the Consulate's St. Bernard dog, which looks like a Panda bear – we left for LongXing, an hour's drive from the center of Chengdu, together with Frank Eggmann, his wife Vicky Eggmann, and his staff.



Members of the Swiss delegation

On our way to LongXing, we enjoyed great views of beautiful Chengdu and some of us, who had not been in Chengdu for some years, marveled at the incredible development the city has undergone in recent years. Previous «ghost quarters» are now fully inhabited and embedded in lush green gardens and parks. Arriving at the kindergarten, we were welcomed with a «xiexie-ni» song and greeted warmly by senior representatives of the kindergarten and the LongXing community. Felix Sutter, president of the SCCC, and Daniel Heusser, CEO of virtuararch, both of them driving forces behind the kindergarten project ten years ago, were immediately treated as the old friends they are – and clearly enjoyed re-uniting with so many Chinese friends and companions who have helped to make the kindergarten the great place it is today.



Welcome conference at LongXing Kindergarten



Felix Sutter writing down his wishes for the kindergarten

Against the background of happy childrens' noises, speeches were given, milestones remembered, and facts and figures presented. One thing became clear quickly: the kindergarten mirrors both the Chinese and the Swiss cultures. In his touching speech, Felix Sutter pointed out that the kindergarten project was not only about building the infrastructure and operating the institution, but also about knowledge transfer on all levels. Daniel Heusser – counting all working hours, Daniel and virtuarch definitely are the single largest contributors and sponsors of the kindergarten – made an especially strong statement in his speech: «This kindergarten was designed for stimulus, fun and happiness – and life has taken over.» The whole ceremony was accompanied by many Chinese media and by Urs Bachofner from Swiss Television SRF.

professional, beautiful, and stimulating place. The pathways of the extensive ground were lined with the childrens' paintings and handicrafts, and plays were performed on small stages. It goes without saying that the children were much too excited to remember their lines and were just watching the delegation while talking nonsense. Frank Eggmann and Felix Sutter expressed their gratitude once more to the headmistress and the teachers of the kindergarten for seeing the children so happy and self-confident. We all left this inspiring place with a present from the children, a smile on our faces, and also some pride in what the Swiss community has built in LongXing.



Children prepared self-made gifts for the delegation

The subsequent transfer to Chongqing high school in LongXing, the place of the memorial concert, went as smoothly as everything else, perfectly organized by Beilun Wei, General Manager of SCCC. The Appreciation Commemoration Concert for the 10th anniversary of the Wenchuan Earthquake was both sad and beautiful. Consul General of Switzerland Frank Eggmann highlighted the power of building a better world through education, collaboration and joint forces: «LongXing is all about that – in the literal and figurative sense.» And he set the memorial's tone by reciting the poem «Lying in the grass» by Hermann Hesse.



LongXing Kindergarten environment

The kindergarten itself was just astonishing. Of course, everything was polished and prepared for the important celebration day, but even without all the decorations and play stands for the visitors, it immediately showed to be a highly



Frank Eggmann welcomes everyone to the memorial concert

Among the Chinese government and school representatives were Ms. LIAO Dongxue, Propaganda

Minister for the Standing Committee of Chongzhou City, Mr. LU Peng, Director General of the Education Department of Chongzhou City, Ms. CHEN Wenya, Director General of the Department of Foreign and Overseas Affairs, Chongzhou Municipal People's Government, Mr. LUO Wei, Secretary of the Party Committee of Longxing Town, and Mr. SU Hongliang, Secretary of the Education Department of Chongzhou City. This high-calibre delegation showed the importance of the event as well as the warm respect for the Swiss community in Chengdu.



Performance by high school students and kindergarten kids

The Commemoration Concert comprised happy songs from kindergarten kids, contemplative performances from teachers, and wonderful music from high school students. The concert was

attended by 420 parents, relatives and friends of the children who lost their lives 10 years ago. The chamber music concert, featuring their own Bach adaptations performed by high school students, raised goose bumps; the fact that the young musicians could have been among the casualties of the earthquake was omnipresent.



Group photo with Swiss delegation and school and kindergarten representatives

A big Thank You to the community of LongXing, and may the flowers of friendship continue to bloom.