

Xie Xiaoyun, Age 17 Beijing, China

My mother has always said that for every problem there is a solution. I think her sense of optimism has kept our family going through hard times. I grew up in a small village in Anhui province in Southeast China, and my parents worked in the field. But when I was five, we moved to Beijing hoping to find a better life. When we settled in the city, we learned that children from other places had to pay higher tuition than local students to attend regular school. My parents couldn't afford the fees, so I went to Qing Lian, a school for migrant workers' kids.

Discrimination against migrant workers is still a widespread problem in China, even though the government has taken many measures to solve it. The labor rights of migrant workers like my parents are not protected, and their kids have few opportunities to receive more education. So it's hard for migrant families to become citizens in these cities. Because of this discrimination, my parents had difficulties finding employment and took every small job they could find.


I thought poverty would never go away, no matter how hard I worked or studied. When my dad was hit by a truck coming home from work, my parents wanted to return to our hometown. But we decided to stay, firm in our belief of a better tomorrow. Dad recovered, but right before the 2008 Olympics, he lost his job again. Now my mother supports the family by preparing lunch boxes.

The best thing that has happened to me in Beijing is that I enrolled in the BN Vocational School (BNVS). It has become a family to me. I chose BNVS because my parents could not afford high school tuition and BNVS was free. To be honest, I was disappointed when I first saw the school. I asked myself: "How can this place—a plain three-story building with narrow hallways—be called a vocational school?" But soon I felt at home.

Vocational education wasn't as simple as I had imagined, and some skills were tricky to grasp. But here at BNVS, each student has a tutor to help us in our studies, listen to our stories and help solve our problems. All test scores are kept confidential as our teachers want us to focus on what we learn, not our grades.

As a school supported by charity, BNVS teaches every student to be grateful to those who help us and to know how to give back. I remember helping to raise money for victims of the Sichuan earthquake. I sold 60 newspapers with my partner, and it was my first time standing on the street and talking to strangers. My lesson from that day was to pass love forward, like the Olympic torch relay.

I feel thankful to have learned so many things that will benefit my future and am confident I will find my place in this city. At school, I have enrolled in the property and hotel service training and have been hired as an intern to do room service and cleaning at a local apartment building. By working hard every day, I can show my gratitude to the school and to society—and ease the financial burdens on my parents. I believe perseverance opens the door to opportunity and helps us face our difficulties while keeping our ideals. **Y**



Xie sold newspapers to raise money for earthquake victims. She is one of 900 students in China benefiting from IYF's partnership with the Tiger Woods Foundation through scholarship support.

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