



# The Land of the Blue Sky: Mongolia

**Angela Chesser**

University of Michigan School of Social Work



## Murun, Mongolia

Mongolia is a landlocked country in east-central Asia, bordered by China and Russia. Mongolian is the official language of Mongolia, but students begin to learn English in primary school. Mongolia is the size of Alaska in landmass but only has a population of 2.9 million people.

I was placed in the city center, Murun, in the northern province of Khuvsgul. Murun has a population of 35,000 people living in wooden houses and traditional Mongolian gers (yurts).

## Field Placement

**Primary Field Placement:** Murun's Vocational Training School for adolescents from ages 13 to 20. Varying circumstances bring students to the school to learn specific job skills in carpentry, cosmetology, auto motor, welding, retail, food industry and plumbing.

Being a Community Youth Development volunteer, I supported my school social worker by developing trainings, working with dormitory students and teachers, consulting with the school social worker and organized activities to increase positive youth development.

## Outcomes

- Increased development of school social work within the vocational school setting
- Positive youth development through life skills lessons focusing on self-esteem, decision making, and peer relationships
- Various trainings with the teachers and staff focusing on child-friendly schools

## Community Partners

- Book Bridge – English Library
  - English language lessons with students from secondary schools
  - Celebrated American holidays with lessons surrounding American culture
- Murun's Organization of People with Disabilities
  - English language lessons with community members with disabilities

## Trainings

- Murun's School Social Worker's Life Skills and Health training
- Classroom Management techniques with Murun's Vocational Training School teachers
- Positive Discipline techniques with Murun's Vocational Training School teachers
- 2014 Community Youth Development Resource Trainer for new Peace Corps cohort



## Secondary Project

- **The Reindeer Project: Enhancing Self-Advocacy in Marginalized Communities**
  - English and health development for the Dukha community
  - Cultural exchange with families
  - Enhancing youth voice through life skills lessons



## Skills Developed

- Increased flexibility in unpredictable situations
- Increased ability in verbal and nonverbal communication
- Creativity with limited resources
- Increased self-awareness

## Lessons Learned

- The biggest learning opportunities were during my biggest failures.
- It does not matter how many people attend an event or training; all that matters is the quality of work and effort you put into it so those people who are there are receiving the best information.
- My most successful projects started with established relationships with community members.

## Connections

### **SW 799 – Issues in Global Social Work Practice**

I became aware of my own assumptions, values and positionalities that would impact my future work in Mongolia. Having this self-awareness enabled me to develop strategies for effective practice in the Mongolian setting.

### **SW 625 – Interpersonal Practice With Children and Youth**

I learned about the interaction between environmental risk factors, protective factors, promotive and developmental factors with assessing youth and how those factors impact their lives. This helped me assess and develop projects and clubs that kept Mongolian youth engaged and interested.

### **SW 651 – Planning for Organizational and Community Change**

I learned the importance of communication and relationships were central to the success of planning projects and developing change within my community. When I first arrived in Mongolia, I focused my attention on my language skills and building relationships within my community

### **Career Connections:**

I plan to utilize all the skills I learned as a Community Youth Development worker in Mongolia to continue my work with adolescents. I would like to continue to develop programs in the United States to enhance youth voice and provide mental health services to adolescents.

## Advice

- *Learn to laugh at yourself.*
- *In any global setting, build relationships with the community members first.*
- *You are going to fail at one time or another, embrace it and learn from it.*

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