

BOULDER-LHASA SISTER CITY PROJECT

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Assessing Lhungtse's Health 30 October-7 November 2016

Lhungtse is the blind Tibetan girl who lives in Kham on the Tibetan Plateau (Yajiang County in western Sichuan Province of China) with her mother and brother. Because her father passed away in 2004, her mother has been working for twelve years as a farmer to support her family of three. Around 2007, Lhungtse began losing her vision in both eyes and also started suffering from headaches and seizures. In 2010, Dr. Li Tiaoying, Sichuan Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (SCDC), Chengdu, Sichuan, diagnosed Lhungtse to have a very serious case of a parasitic disease called neurocysticercosis, which has caused Lhungtse's total blindness.

2013 - Lhungtse's Brain Surgery Thanks to generous donations from many of you and others, Lhungtse received ventriculoperitoneal (VP) shunt brain surgery on 5 September 2013 at Sichuan Provincial People's Hospital in Chengdu. BLSCP raised \$13,000 before her surgery and \$6,091.71 afterwards to pay for all of the hospital costs and related expenses.

Post-surgery complications The brain surgery was not able to restore any of Lhungtse's eyesight but did relieve many of her other symptoms. For the past three years, BLSCP has funded her expenses for periodic medical checkups and medicines. A drug called Albendazole killed all of the parasitic cysts in her brain, but the dead parasitic cysts typically began to calcify in 2014. These calcified lesions have been causing Lhungtse to suffer from epileptic seizures for the past two years. She has been taking an anti-epileptic drug called Oxcarbazepine to help control these seizures. During the spring and summer of 2016, Lhungtse suffered from more seizures than before. Therefore, she was not able to return to Ganzi Prefecture Special School in Kangding for the fall term.

October 30-November 1 - Chengdu BLSCP members Bill Warnock and Shari Mayer traveled to Chengdu to take Lhungtse to her neurologist, Dr. Zeng Xian Rong, for an examination and tests. Bill and Shari used personal funds to pay for all of their travel costs. Lhungtse and her mother were at the Chengdu airport to greet Bill when he arrived on October 30. On November 1, Bill, Lhungtse, and her mother were taken to the Chengdu airport by our guide, Tenpa, to greet Shari. This photo shows Lhungtse and her mother holding khata (ceremonial scarves) to offer to Shari. However, just after Bill took the photo, Lhungtse had a seizure and fell to the floor before anyone could catch her. She regained consciousness after we moved her to a chair.

November 2-4 - Chengdu Our excellent tour guide, driver, and interpreter/translator was again Tenpa Tenzin. On November 2, our tour provided by Conscious Journeys began, and he drove us to Sichuan Provincial People's Hospital for the examination by Dr. Zeng. We learned that Lhungtse had suffered another seizure overnight and another one that morning at her hotel. Then we witnessed two more seizures at the hospital as we were waiting to see Dr. Zeng. Her



Lhungtse and her mother waiting for Shari at the Chengdu airport on November 1

seizure symptoms were the same as those that she had been usually experiencing over the past two years. They include a temporary (for a few to several minutes) paralysis of the her hands and jaw, in addition to a loss of consciousness that may cause her to fall down if she is standing with no one to hold her. We were obviously very concerned about Lhungtse's condition.

Dr. Zeng prescribed for Lhungtse to begin taking Clonazepam (1 mg each night before bedtime), in addition to continuing to take Oxcarbazepine (one 300-mg tablet, three times each day). Clonazepam's uses include the treatment of epilepsy and anxiety disorders. Lhungtse's mother reported to us that sometimes Lhungtse has had a seizure that is preceded by her worrying for hours about her family's future. Dr. Zeng also ordered a CT brain scan and blood tests for Lhungtse. Lhungtse was not able to take a cognitive reasoning examination because it requires reading and drawing. The CT scan showed showed no new brain issues. The blood tests showed good liver and kidney function.

November 5-7 - Kangding On November 5, we drove to Kangding to have some fun and visit friends. On November 7, we returned Lhungtse and her mother to their home in Yajiang.



Bill and Lhungtse in Kangding at Malaya Restaurant on November 5



Bill, Lhungtse, Lhungtse's mother, and Shari in Yajiang at Lhungtse's home on November 7

Lhungtse's Status On November 28, Bill learned from Tenpa that Lhungtse has been taking her two medicines on time and had not had any seizures since November 2 in Chengdu. So far the Clonazepam appears to be an effective medication for her, perhaps by lessening her anxiety level. She has been helping her mother with sweeping the floor and washing dishes. We hope that her mother will follow our suggestion to teach Lhungtse how to knit clothing items. This could be a good hobby for her and help to build her self-confidence. At this time, we do not know whether she will be able to return to Ganzi Prefecture Special School for the spring term.



Lhungtse washing dishes at her home around November 23

Lhungtse's Continuing Medical Costs On November 2, BLSCP purchased enough medicines for Lhungtse to last until 10 April 2017. Dr. Zeng requested Lhungtse and her mother to return to Chengdu for another checkup around the end of October 2017. From previous donations, BLSCP now has a small balance of funds that we would like to retain for any unforeseen complications that Lhungtse may have.

Since Lhungtse's medicines cost \$2 each day, we will need \$400 to cover the cost of her medicines from April 2017 through October 2017. Her next checkup will cost around \$500. Please show your compassion for Lhungtse by making your tax-deductible donation toward these costs totaling \$900. **Checks may be mailed to BLSCP, 776 Cottage Ln, Boulder, CO 80304-0758.**

New BLSCP Project Now Under Development

During Bill's dinner meeting on October 31 with Dr. Li Tiaoying, they discussed a new joint project for 2017. It would focus on arranging MRI brain scans for 33 Tibetan primary school students in Sichuan Province whose blood has already tested positive for cysticercosis. After we gather more information from Dr. Li, we will provide you with the details.

Bill Warnock, President
3 December 2016