

PRESCHOOL AND PLAY DOUGH WITH DUO

July 14, 2009

Callie Ellison, a senior at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania, was a Chinese Studies major and had been a donor to China Care when she learned about our volunteer program. She was excited at the prospect of living in China to better understand the culture and work hands-on with the children and joined us in the summer of 2008. While there, Callie helped with our older children in preschool. "Perhaps the best moment was when I saw one or more of the children in the afternoon and they smiled and waved at me," Callie remembers. "That is when I knew that I had made an impact on their young lives." As she recounts below, one three year old boy named Duo affected her as well.



At first, Duo seemed a little skeptical when we came to play with him and his preschool friends. He would raise an eyebrow at me and frown, but would watch with curiosity as I interacted with his friends. Now, after a few weeks, Duo's eyes light up with excitement when he sees me and the other interns. We are greeted each day with his wide smiles and calls of "ni hao" or "hi".



Duo and his play dough

Duo was born in China's Shanxi Province. The circumstances of his abandonment are unknown, but he lived at an orphanage until he was four months old, at which point he was brought to China Care. Duo was most likely abandoned because of his various physical disabilities. He was born with a hernia in his stomach, spina bifida, scoliosis, a deformed pelvis and left leg and too many toes on his left foot. Duo has undergone numerous surgeries already to correct his hernia and to amputate his left leg. China Care has provided Duo with a prosthetic leg and plans to get him a brace to correct his spine when he gets taller. In the meantime, the combination of the prosthetic leg and the curved spine make Duo's gate extremely unbalanced.

Despite his many disabilities, Duo is undeterred and has learned to walk well. In fact, he loves to play games, such as "Red Light, Green Light," where the purpose is to run as far and as fast as you can when someone flashes the green light, and halt immediately when they flash the red light. Duo smiles broadly and laughs up a storm as he runs across his foster parents' living room in an attempt to win the game!



Duo before surgery

Duo shows that same enthusiasm when working with play dough. During preschool, he rolls the dough into many balls before determinedly smashing them all back into flat pancakes. He likes to include the volunteers and will get up from the table and give one of us some of his play dough balls before he sits back down to make some more. When playtime is over, Duo cheerfully helps clean up his mess. He packs up the play dough accessories into their little bag and leads the way to where the preschool toys are stored. It is obvious that he is a favorite of many of the staff who smile and say "Ni hao, Duo!" He always shyly smiles back and rushes to put away the play dough.



Duo with his prosthetic leg

Duo, who entered this world with so many complex health problems, is lucky to be in the hands of China Care, which has provided him with life-altering surgeries and given him a loving foster family with a mom, a dad, two sisters and a brother.