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### **‘Christ followers’ provide early intervention, rehabilitation for children with cerebral palsy**

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ATLANTA – In all of China there are few schools designed specifically to serve children with cerebral palsy. One is Angel House Rehabilitation & Education Center in Guangxi Province along China’s southern border.

At Angel House, each child is integrated into a professional program. The goal is to help youngsters with mild to moderate cerebral palsy assume normal roles in society, said Brenda Lisenby, who serves in China as one of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s representatives. Lisenby’s work in China is directly supported by the monetary contributions to the CBF Offering for Global Missions.

“Why do you provide this service?” parents often query Angel House director Kate Wang Fang. Her answer: “We are Christ followers.”

Although the government keeps no record of these births, one private study estimates that 1.78 million Chinese children under the age of 13 have cerebral palsy (CP), a motor impairment due to brain damage. Primarily because of poverty and limited services – and China’s laws limiting one child per family – these children are abandoned. While there is no known cure for cerebral palsy, most benefit from early intervention.

When little Fei Fei, 3, arrived at Angel House, he was unable to sit up, and he lagged behind in verbal skills. With early intervention, his cognitive and speech development are now nearly at normal levels for his age. He can sit without assistance, and he is gaining strength in his legs. Fei Fei’s family has matched his progress with great enthusiasm, love and sacrifices of their own. His grandfather eagerly handcrafted devices to aid in Fei Fei’s therapy, and when the toddler was ready for braces, the family paid \$150 in cash – equivalent to a month’s income in China.

Angel House serves 20 children with a range of physical disabilities. CP can affect only

the legs, or only the right or left half of the body or CP can affect arms legs, even torso and facial muscles. The most common form is spastic CP, involving too much muscle tone or tightness that results in stiff movements of the legs, arms or back. It can also inhibit speech when it affects muscles of the tongue and throat.

The Angel House staff of 14 forms a professional team consisting of special education teachers, rehab workers, care givers and administrators. Their program includes speech therapy, exercise for developing gross and fine motor skills, cognitive development, and role play designed to prepare students for transition into society.

“Because non-government organizations are rare in China, Kate struggled to get Angel House off the ground,” said Lisenby. “We relate openly as a Christian organization. We are not always well received. Some local schools and local governments prefer not to partner with Christian organizations. But then there are others who do wish to partner with us.”

Working at Angel House has been life changing for those who work there – including Lisenby, a Texas native with a master’s degree in elementary education. For six years, she taught English at a Chinese university. She continues to recruit teachers and work with partners to provide courses in English for Chinese students. She notes that there are many English teaching opportunities – short-term, long-term, for middle school- and university-level students.

But now she believes that God may be redirecting her ministry to focus on groundbreaking work in special needs education, just initiated in China in the 90s. With her background in education, her facility with the Chinese language, and her growing network, she is excited about the potential for serving in this way.

“We definitely work among a marginalized segment of society,” Lisenby said. “This work gives me an opportunity to impact whole families, and even the community at large, as the Chinese learn how to affirm and welcome special needs individuals into their society. I am amazed at how God works.”

To give to the Offering for Global Missions, which funds the operations of CBF Global Missions, including Lisenby’s ministry, go to [www.thefellowship.info/landing/giving.icm](http://www.thefellowship.info/landing/giving.icm). The national goal for 2006-2007 is \$6.32 million.

CBF is a fellowship of Baptist Christians and churches who share a passion for the Great Commission and a commitment to Baptist principles of faith and practice. The Fellowship’s mission is to serve Christians and churches as they discover and fulfill their God-given mission.

**Photo Information:** Angel House director Kate Wang Fang, right, works with Xiao Yu as her mother participates in training. Jay Paul photo

