

# YOUTH

## Social worker always ready to serve

Based in Jiangsu province, she understands the importance of her field, especially during the pandemic, **Wang Qian** reports.

Since Suzhou, Jiangsu province, started to face the resurgence of COVID-19 in February, Sun Linlin, head of Qingliu social workers' center in the city, has been thinking of ways by which they can participate in the front lines to help contain the virus and offer online services for people in need.



"The pandemic has posed new questions for social workers — how to provide proper service and better coordinate with the government," says the 33-year-old.

Having been a social worker for 11 years, this is a challenging time for her, because pandemic-related restrictions make most of the face-to-face social care practice impossible.

"Although facing difficulties, such as underfunding and health risks, Qingliu still found its way to deliver services," Sun says.

According to official statistics, there were about 12,000 expat residents in Suzhou in 2020. The city was listed as one of the "most attractive Chinese cities for foreigners" by the Foreign Talent Research Center of the Ministry of Science and Technology in 2020.

To help expats get firsthand information, in mid-February, Qingliu set up a team of "language volunteers" that posts tips on pandemic control measures, such as nucleic acid testing, in Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean and the local dialect.

Ann Stephen-Smith, a Malaysian living in Suzhou, sent a thank-you message to Zhao Susu, an English-speaking volunteer of the team, for "keeping her community well-informed".

In the note, she writes: "I know you have been working full throttle, days and nights, to keep us informed with accurate and timely news about testings, results from the testings, updates and translation from news conferences and its impact on our community, addressing problems expats had with the health apps and beyond."

Besides participating in the front

lines of such activities, Sun has moved Qingliu's services to virtual platforms.

"The pandemic has upended daily life, forcing parents working from home and students studying at home. To help families to get through the stressful time, we have invited teachers and psychological consultants to provide online courses once a week on such subjects as how parents develop a healthy relationship with their children and how students concentrate during remote studying," Sun says.

Like Qingliu, there are many social service organizations across the country contributing to the battle against COVID-19 through their volunteering services in communities and online.

China's social services sector has grown in recent years, with some 737,000 licensed social workers, as of last year. The number was about 288,000 in 2016, according to the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

"Social workers should act like a bridge linking residents and local governments, but in China, many people are not familiar with the profession, and the sector's development is in the early stages," Sun says. She says she did not know what social work was before entering college.

In China, social work education began in the 1980s. In 1988, the then State Education Commission approved the launch of social work and management major in four universities, including Peking University and Renmin University of China in Beijing. Now, more than 300 universities and colleges offer bachelor's degree programs in social work major and more than 100 offer master's programs in the same major.

Social work is the practice-based profession and an academic



**Above:** Sun Linlin (left) visits a primary school in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, to give scarves to migrant workers' children.

**Right:** Sun attends a walking event to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China.

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"The pandemic has posed new questions for social workers — how to provide proper service and better coordinate with the government."

**Sun Linlin**, head of Qingliu social workers' center in Suzhou, Jiangsu province

discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment of people, according to the International Federation of Social Workers.

In China, social work covers such sectors as social welfare, social assistance, poverty elimination,

marriage and family affairs, mental health, disabled people's rehabilitation and employment assistance.

After Sun graduated from Suzhou University of Science and Technology in 2011, she went to Shenzhen in Guangdong province to promote social work in 2011.

After a year of practice, she returned to Suzhou and became the first full-time social worker at Qingliu, a private agency.

"At first, it was quite difficult, because I had no program and no team. There was even a summer month that I could hardly make ends meet," Sun says.

Sun, who specialized in social services for children and families, has helped many who were struggling with social or psychological issues.

Among the cases was one that happened about 10 years ago, when an 8-year-old girl was sexually assaulted by a neighbor. The parents reported to the police and under the parents' approval, Sun was contacted to help the family get through the trauma. Suffering from PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder, the girl and her parents urgently needed timely help and treatment. Within 10 months, Sun had met the family multiple times.

"At first, the girl could not sleep at night and didn't dare to go to public areas, and after our 48 visits, she was back to her normal life," Sun recounts.

For the past 10 years, Sun has kept contact with the family to keep an eye on the daughter, in case some related symptoms come back as she grows up.

Sun says there are about 100 child sex abuse cases every year on average in Suzhou, and most of the victims and their families need help from social workers.

Besides helping individuals in need, Sun has also cooperated with local authorities to organize and develop social programs to improve the quality of life in communities. With many successful cases and community programs, Qingliu has been growing — from only one full-time worker, Sun, in 2012, to about 30 full-time employees today.

"I am the lucky one to let social work be seen by more people," Sun says.

Contact the writer at wangqian@chinadaily.com.cn

## Engineer builds a bridge to his dream in Bangladesh

Holding fast to their dreams and rising to face challenges, young Chinese have left an indelible mark through their work in support of people's well-being in countries with the Belt and Road Initiative projects.

They have advanced such projects with big implications for the relevant countries in the fields of infrastructure construction and healthcare, shared skills with co-workers and made friends with local people.

Born in 1994, Zhou Lin joined the China Railway Major Bridge Engineering Group straight after graduating from university. He has worked for years on the Padma Multipurpose Bridge project in Bangladesh, a bridge that could shorten the trip between the country's capital,

Dhaka, and its southwestern regions to just 10 minutes from seven to eight hours.

The young man does not talk much, but he is not afraid of innovation, and through years of hard work, he has become the deputy manager of the project's engineering department.

Located in an area with complicated geological conditions, the project brought multiple challenges to Zhou and his colleagues, requiring the adaptation of a number of original technologies. At first, he would turn to the head of the engineering department for advice when encountering difficulties. As time passed, he learned to solve problems based on research before reaching out to senior engineers.

"I still remember the time when I

designed a lifting beam and made calculations partly based on data from an online reference book. When I showed the calculations to a senior engineer, he asked me to clarify the source of each data point and not to take the risk of using wrong references," Zhou recalls. "I really learned a lesson that day. From then on, I never forget to verify the details."

The engineering workers on the project wrote suggestions to optimize construction procedures on a regular basis, and the project leader revised the suggestions word by word. "Each time, I would carefully compare the revisions and my original version, and reflect on how to improve in terms of logic and expressions," he adds.

So far, he has participated in the

application of seven patents, three of which have already been licensed in China. Zhou has also mentored younger engineers.

"While on site, we often need to make temporary designs for architectural structures. I think the younger engineers can learn more by doing it independently. So I usually make a sketch and explain the structure before assigning the work, and then I check their progress frequently," he says.

The bridge is located above a river with banks on loose soil. Downpours in the rainy season often caused flooding, putting the staff accommodation and construction facilities at risk of serious damage.

Not long after Zhou started working on the project, the area was lashed by days of torrential rain,

with the river rising to a dangerous level. He was among the first to join the flood-relief team. In the face of rolling waves, he worked side by side with other team members, establishing effective procedures to prevent flooding with sandbags.

After years in Bangladesh, his face is now deeply tanned, and he is more than happy to remain in the country.

"The local people are friendly to Chinese, and they often take us shopping or to taste local flavors in our spare time," he says.

Zhou also likes to share what he has learned on the project with young Bangladeshi technical staff members, and discuss technical problems with them to help train the local engineering talent.

He says his dream is to become an

expert in bridge building, and that he's happy "to do something to improve the infrastructure" in countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

According to Mostak Ahamed Galib, executive director of the cross-cultural communication and BRI research center at Wuhan University of Technology, the Padma bridge project will bring benefits to Bangladesh in the coming years.

"The bridge is considered a 'bridge of hope' in Bangladesh. Its opening is expected to drive an increase of the country's annual GDP by 1.5 percent and bring new opportunities to the youth in 21 southwestern regions of the country," Galib says.

"Chinese youth in the new era have set a role model for the over 50 million young people in Bangladesh in jointly creating a better future for humanity."

XINHUA

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