

# Families with Children from China

## Austin, Texas Chapter

Fall Newsletter

August, 2014



## President's Note

Nobody can say the dog days aren't upon us, but it feels like August is one of our busiest months and there's no slowing down. This month alone we've had a sold-out and most successful ever Culture Camp, as well as the President's Pot Luck and a board meeting.

I am astounded that you all didn't stop when I said I would "get" a Red Sox Beard if we met a target of 90 member families for this year. You one-upped me and joined to the tune of 105 (so far). So somewhere in this issue our faithful designer/Past President Kim Goodman has put a "Where's Waldo-I-Mean-Alan" bearded photo into the newsletter. See if you can find it. If we grow to 110 families—oh, I better stop while I'm ahead!

We've had a busy year, from Chinese New Year to Jenny Bowen's BookPeople appearance, from an outstanding Culture Camp to a BabySitter training/website for member teens, and from a Summer Series cooking class with Dorothy Huang to, well, Dorothy's beef with broccoli recipe delivered in action at the President's Potluck. Other successful Summer Series events included an RR Express baseball game, the very well-attended and popular Buddhist Temple tour, and a pre-school playgroup. We announced the winner of one of our two scholarship offerings for teens, Alisan Turner, now off to UT Dallas after training a set of teens/tweens in best practices for babysitting. And we are gearing up now for the fall: Moonfest on September 14, returning to Brushy Creek Park, a location that worked well for us in the past. (You should see the construction going on at Central Market, which is not gonna work for us.) Other upcoming events are a possible screening of Dr. Changfu Chang's *Ricki's Promise*, as well as the Chinese New Year celebration to be held Sunday, February 22, 2015.

So thinking ahead to Thanksgiving (yes only three months away!), I am giving thanks for these elements of my life and your life: 1) a terrific board working on terrific ideas for all of us and our kids; and 2) terrific volunteers and Past board members who never let up on their involvement and support—you know who you are.

In this issue, Abby Turner describes the Library and reviews one of her favorite children's books. Kathleen McDonagh and Mike Revesz provide the Focus on the Family after Kathleen and daughter Charlotte made a recent return trip to China. Carrie van der Wal visits with Robyn Stringfellow of Murchison Middle School, who is teaching a number of FCC kids Mandarin. We recap the Culture Camp, Jenny Bowen visit, scholarship program, UT China care, and more. And we share details on the upcoming Moonfest.

Thank you for being a part of this community—FCC is always here for you and every one of you is welcome anytime to draw upon our resources.

Alan D. Greenberg

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# FCC Awards Scholarship

By Jena Goodridge

It is with great pleasure that the FCC Austin Board has awarded its first annual scholarship. Alisan Turner (see photo) is the inaugural recipient to the FCC Austin Educational Scholarship in the amount of \$500. The scholarship was presented to Alisan in June.

FCC Austin recognizes that our membership's children are at different stages of their lives and preparing for wonderful life changing experiences such as beginning/returning to college or preparing to travel to China for a Welfare trip.

Therefore, at the annual FCC Chinese New Year celebration this past February, former FCC president, Becky Harding, announced the creation of two scholarships:

1. One \$500 scholarship for a student beginning or returning to college/university (Scholarship For Higher Education)
2. One \$500 scholarship for a student embarking on a China welfare trip (Scholarship for Volunteer/Welfare Trip)



The scholarship application required applicants to respond to an essay topic. The essays were judged blindly by an independent party of judges. FCC would like to thank our judges again for their time and participation. Unfortunately, the committee did not receive any applications for the Scholarship for Volunteer/Welfare Trip.

The Board hopes that next year we will receive great interest and participation in these two scholarships! ❖

*Jena Goodridge is an FCC Austin Board Member and administers the scholarship award.*

## Thinking About A Heritage Tour?

While reporting on her family's spring break trip to China, FCC board member Carrie van der Wal mentioned in our spring 2014 newsletter that she was in the initial stages of exploring an FCC group trip to China. The van der Wal family has decided to wait another few years before a repeat trip. But if you're looking to plan a family trip to China and would like to know more about the van der Wal's experience during their trip to Beijing last March, feel free to contact Carrie directly at [carrielee@yahoo.com](mailto:carrielee@yahoo.com). The tour company that they used—China Spree—is offering a 12-day trip to China in March 2015 for \$1,669. That per person price is valid through August 31 and includes airfare from Houston. ❖

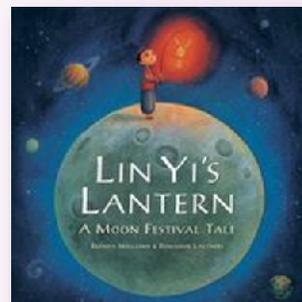
<http://www.chinaspree.com/escorted-china-tours/the-middle-kingdom-tour-2014/china-tour-departures.aspx>

# FCC Austin's Library

By Abby Turner

You may have seen a table full of books at one of our functions and wondered what it was about. Here is the answer: FCC has a library.

We have a small collection of materials to borrow for children and adults. The books fit into the categories of Adoption, China, Chinese American or Parenting. We have books, DVDs, and VHS tapes. There are a few titles in Chinese as well. If you would like to know what we have on hand check out the list on the FCC web page, [www.fccAustin.org](http://www.fccAustin.org) and click on the Library link at the bottom right. Then email me at [abbyo814@icloud.com](mailto:abbyo814@icloud.com) or call me at (512) 751-7125. I will either mail or drop off the desired materials. I will give you an envelope to return mail or I will return to pick up when you have finished with them. There are no due dates or fines.



We have a couple of wonderful children's books from Barefoot Books. One of my favorites is *Lin Yi's Lantern: A Moon Festival Tale*, by Brenda Williams and Benjamin Lacombe. The illustrations in this picture book are bright and rich in detail. It is set in old China and features a boy charged with shopping responsibilities. He makes good choices and is rewarded. His family is loving and the child is endearingly real. The book includes *The legend of the Moon Fairy* and *How to make a Chinese lantern*. Well worth the read! ❖

*Abby Turner is FCC Austin's in-house librarian, Past President, and a current Board Member.*

# FCC Austin Culture Camp Summary



2014 FCC-UT Chinese culture camp was an incredible week of community building. We tried to thank everyone involved in the project at the Friday night pot luck but if we missed you, please know that we extend our gratitude to each and every person on the team that helps create this village year after year. You can guess this one is coming back next year... look for the Year of the Sheep registration forms online at [www.fccaustin.org](http://www.fccaustin.org) on March 1, 2015.

## From a Counselor

I was a counselor for the FCC Culture Camp this past week. I would like to thank Becky and Rowena for putting on such a great event! Hopefully, you are getting some well-deserved rest after planning and executing such a wonderful camp. I absolutely loved the Monkeys and they were such a joy to be around. The camp



also opened my eyes a lot to the concerns and issues that adopted children, especially those adopted from Asia, may face and it has definitely given me a bigger heart for these wonderful kids. I am definitely looking forward to being a counselor next year!

## From a Teacher

Just want to tell you how thankful I am for making my efforts and being part of the Chinese Culture Camp. I have had a great week in Austin. I really enjoyed the time I spent with all the kids, the counselors, the parents, and everyone there! The camp was very well designed and organized. It really opened my mind and taught me a lot in every aspect of my personal and professional life. Thanks for being so amazing!



## From a Parent

Hard to believe it's the 5th year of FCC camp! As usual, it was awesome. Our kid still says she wants to keep doing it every year it's offered, and wants to be a junior counselor when she's old enough. Our hats are off to all the tireless volunteers, and especially Becky and Auntie Rowena (and their supportive families) for the gargantuan effort they put into the camp. The Austin FCC community is blessed.

## From a Camper

This was the best experience of my life! ❖

*Becky Harding, Camp Co-Director, is Past President of FCC Austin.*



## Smile.Amazon.Com! Buy Stuff and Donate to FCC Austin

So Amazon sends a letter saying they have a program whereby they donate 0.5% of eligible purchases to eligible non-profits. No-brainer! If you visit <https://smile.amazon.com> and select FCC Austin, you will be able to make purchases and contribute to our worthy organization at the same time. **Caveat:** You must select the FCC Austin chapter when it asks you which organization you wish to support. There are other FCC chapters as well. Search the available recipient orgs with the search term "Families with Children from China" and then scroll through to the Austin Chapter. The rest is easy-peasy. Not all Amazon purchases are eligible, but we noticed that Amazon tells you once shopping if an item is "Amazon-smile" eligible the same way it tells you if an item is Prime eligible. Thanks to FCC Treasurer Vicki Gargano for getting us Amazoned. ❖

# Family Focus: McDonagh-Revesz

By Kathleen McDonagh & Mike Revesz

“As avid international folk dancers, we’ve always had an interest in the music and art of world cultures; but now there was a deeper reason for us to learn more about China and explore that part of our family’s heritage.”

—Kathleen McDonagh



*Dumplings and ice cream—our children’s staple foods for the trip (dumplings hand-made by our students themselves).*

At this time of year, with September approaching, we look forward to a very special month for our household. In September 2008, our family grew from two members to three when we (Kathleen McDonagh and Mike Revesz) traveled to Chongqing to meet our daughter Charlotte just a couple weeks shy of her first birthday. In addition to our “familyversary,” September marks our wedding anniversary and Charlotte’s birthday, all happening within two weeks of each other. Throw in the Chinese Moon Festival, and we are talking about a very celebratory month!

As avid international folk dancers, we’ve always had an interest in the music and art of world cultures; but now there was a deeper reason for us to learn more about China and explore that part of our family’s heritage. A few years ago, we were pleased and surprised to discover a school mere blocks from our home that offered immersion classes in Mandarin. We both felt

strongly the importance of providing our daughter with the opportunity to learn Mandarin, and Charlotte began attending classes several times a week. Towards the end of 2013, the school announced they would be offering a summer program featuring a two week trip to Beijing with immersion classes for the kids and language session for parents as well.

We had always planned to visit China as a family at some point in the next few years, but the more we thought about it, the more it seemed like an opportunity we didn’t want to pass up, what with Charlotte being still in those years where kids are language sponges. We decided that Kathleen and Charlotte would make the journey. With the departure date fast approaching, Kathleen started taking a weekly Mandarin class of her own. [Mike’s note: Charlotte also likes to put together the occasional weekend Mandarin teaching for her parents as well, but it must be said that Dad is

a little slow on the uptake to this point.] To make sure the usual summer trip to visit extended family could still happen, we routed the connecting flight through Seattle. Thus, the whole Beijing excursion would be sandwiched between some state-side R&R, Pacific Northwest style.



*Experiencing the infamous Beijing traffic on the way to dinner.*



*Strolling hand-in-hand through the Forbidden City.*

The program consisted of two weeks of instruction held on the grounds of the Shang Li Foreign Language School, located in the Fragrant Hills area on the outskirts of Beijing. The kids from Austin, 10 in all, were ages 5 to 10 years and were divided into a younger and an older group. On weekday mornings, they attended classes that featured play-based language instruction and after lunch, they met up with local children for playtime. The children also got to spend a day in the homes of

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their Chinese hosts, getting to help make and eat a typical family meal. Meanwhile, parents were offered beginning instruction in Mandarin in the mornings and cut loose in the afternoons to see the sites or otherwise experience Beijing until everyone met up back at the school for dinner.

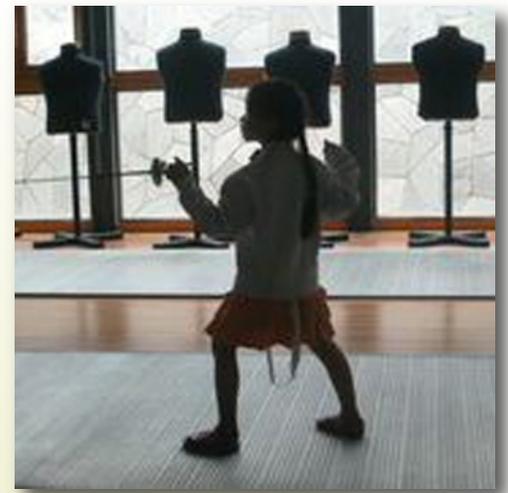


A beautiful sunny day on the grounds of the ShangLi Foreign Language School.

The grounds of the school were lovely, with local residents using the space for recreation and exercise such as Tai Chi and ballroom dancing. After dinner, it was common to see the kids playing pickup games of soccer or basketball, practicing their skateboarding, or enjoying a popsicle from the local convenience store. In a per-

sonal triumph of recently acquired language skills, Kathleen used her Mandarin to ask if she could join several ladies dancing some line dances, and they gladly taught her their dances!

The weekends were primarily devoted to sightseeing: our Austin families visited the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, Olympic Park and the Summer Palace with a sprinkling of tea ceremonies, shopping, and of course, great local food. A particular highlight for Kathleen was the Ethnic Museum on whose grounds were recreated villages from many of the ethnic minorities of China, including Miao and Tujia—both prominent in the area where Charlotte is from. And of course, there had to be a pilgrimage to the Great Wall, taking place on a beautifully clear but downright Texas-like summer day. It should be mentioned that this culturally diverse group of visiting Mandarin scholars from Austin did not just visit tourist attractions but also served as tourist attractions themselves. The group proved an irresistible draw to Chinese tourists, who politely but enthusiastically looked upon any stop in the group's action as an opportunity to grab a group photo with the Austin kids.



Our little Olympian practicing for the 2028 Olympics.

Back home again on the 23rd of July, mother and daughter had just over a week to get back in the swing of things before hitting Culture Camp, making for a very full and fulfilling summer. ❖

The McDonagh-Revesz family lives in central Austin and regularly participates in FCC events.

## Vote By September 5th!

This is REALLY important. You have just a few days in which to help FCC Austin win a \$2,000, \$3,000, or \$5,000 grant. We submitted a photo entry to an Austin-based company called Community TechKnowledge. They support non-profits and have a photo contest running. All you need to do is Like their page on Facebook, then vote for the Culture Camp photo we submitted. Here's the link: <http://bit.ly/1q6yhf4>. Please please please share it with your friends and loved ones! Alan really wants those funds for scholarships and programs and he promises if we win, he'll stop making us suffer through his facial hair complexes. ❖



## Liftoff For Moonfest

**When:** Sunday September 14, 2014, 4 to 7 PM

**Where:** Brushy Creek Lake Park in the Cedar Pavilion,  
3300 Brushy Creek Rd., Cedar Park, just off Parmer Lane  
<http://www.cedarparktexas.gov/index.aspx?page=577>



The idea is to take advantage of a very cool splash pad (named best in Austin by the Chronicle some years back) for kids, along with our usual assortment of other kid-friendly activities (balloon guy, face painting, volleyball, and more—details still being worked out). If you are curious, it happens that a large area including the pond at Central Market is under construction, so

for that and other reasons we are returning to a Moonfest locale FCC used some years ago to great success. FCC will provide mooncakes and beverages (waters and kid-friendly drinks) and we encourage families to bring a picnic, swimsuits, and the like. Of course we will also have our traditional tea candle raft! Questions? Contact Abby Turner at [abbyo814@icloud.com](mailto:abbyo814@icloud.com) or Robin Davis at [robinsdavis@austin.rr.com](mailto:robinsdavis@austin.rr.com). ❖

## Friends of the Family: A Series to Highlight those Supportive of our Community

# Featured Friend: Robyn Stringfellow

By Carrie van der Wal



*Robyn Stringfellow is a Mandarin teacher at Murchison Middle School, contributor at various FCC events, and a Chinese Culture Camp teacher.*

**Carrie:** Robyn, what initially attracted you to the Mandarin language and when did you begin studying it?

**Robyn:** *I have always been attracted to foreign languages and cultures, ever since I can remember. After studying multiple European languages I wanted a challenge and acquiring a character-based, tonal language seemed both difficult and exciting. At that time, China was in the midst of great changes and very few people had mastered their language or gained access to their unique culture. I saw this as an opportunity to become a facilitator of greater understanding and appreciation of this great civilization in whatever capacity I could.*

**Carrie:** After graduating from college, what took you to China and what did you do during your time there?

**Robyn:** *In college, I had spent a year studying abroad in France and Germany and was immediately in love with immersing myself in other cultures. After graduation I wanted to explore Asian languages, and since I learn through immersion, I sold everything I owned and moved to China. The first year, I taught English at a rural university in Guangdong province and instantly fell in love with the Chinese people and was fascinated with their history and language. I decided that if I wanted to speak standard Mandarin, I*

*needed to move to the center, Beijing. The next four years of my life were spent there, studying Chinese full time at a university, teaching English on the side and traveling to every corner of China.*

**Carrie:** When did you begin teaching Mandarin at Murchison Middle School and what do you find most gratifying about your job?

**Robyn:** *After returning from China in 2009, I taught kindergarten at a private school in Austin, having no intention of teaching Chinese. In 2010, my resume came across then-principal Cartwright's desk as she was interviewing teachers to take over a small but growing Chinese program at Murchison. I was so impressed with the students, school, and faculty, that I decided to give it a try and I'm so happy I did. Murchison is on the cutting edge of world language instruction and I'm blessed to have amazingly intelligent students, supportive administrators, and the most encouraging and generous parents. I really am the luckiest teacher on the planet to spend each day with my students; they teach me so much and make me feel so loved and so proud.*

**Carrie:** For first-time travelers to China, what are the cities you'd recommend they visit?

**Robyn:** *Most first-time travelers to China want to see the famous tourist sites in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Xi'an. While those cities are very historically and culturally significant, I prefer to travel off the beaten path. My favorite place is Yunnan province: Kunming, Lijiang and Dali are gorgeous*

*places with fascinating minority cultures and breathtaking landscapes. I've also really enjoyed the western provinces of Tibet, Xinjiang and Sichuan. I've been to every province in China and each one has its own distinctive charm and has captured my heart. China is rich with diverse landscapes and cultures, there's never enough time!*

**Carrie:** What are your favorite Chinese foods?

**Robyn:** *There is so much more to Chinese cuisine than the Kung-Pao and Lo-Mein we see in American take out. Each region has its own specialties and preparation methods—there is something for everyone. I love Sichuan and Hunan styles because they are spicy, and my favorites are poached fish, dry fried green beans and sautéed eggplant.*

**Carrie:** When will you visit China again?

**Robyn:** *I am planning a trip with my students for the summer of 2015 and we are really excited. Taking my students to China gives them a chance to practice their skills, and I truly hope it ignites their passion to become life-long learners and appreciators of language and culture. China is changing so quickly that I try to visit at least every other year to make sure my knowledge stays current. More than anything, I just love being there. I feel so at home on her bustling streets, chatting with the locals and each day learning more about her rich past and bright future. ❖*

*Carrie van der Wal is an FCC Austin board member and with her husband Hans is parent to Torin and Odin van der Wal.*

# Greetings From UT China Care!

By Geneve Chin and Nathan Vu

As some of you may know, UT China Care is a non-profit student service organization that raises money to help fund medical surgeries for orphans in China in order to give them a second chance at life. Throughout the year, we send the money that we have raised to Half the Sky, which sees the surgeries through and maintains childcare centers throughout the country to provide China's orphans with a loving and nurturing environment. This past year alone, we were able to raise around \$10,000 and either fully or partially helped fund surgeries for three orphans. In this upcoming school year, we hope to surpass a grand total of \$50,000 raised since our organization was founded in 2010.

In addition to funding surgeries, we also strive to develop a strong relationship with adopted Chinese kids in the Austin area, which is why we partner with FCC through volunteering at FCC events, hosting a bi-weekly playgroup, and running the Big Brother Big Sister Program.

The playgroup events normally begin with a small game in order to get the kids interacting with the college volunteers, followed by a performance or activity led by a cultural organization from UT. Past performances have included a martial arts demonstration, an origami class, and even a lion dance! Our playgroup events also include different arts



and crafts projects, as well as outdoor playtime and snacks. We always hope that these playgroup events continue to foster a strong community among adopted Chinese children as well as their families, as well as to establish a sense of Chinese culture and identity for the kids.

Our playgroup events are held every other Sunday from 2pm–4pm at the Dell Jewish Community Center located at 7300 Hart Lane in the Early Childhood Program Multipurpose Room and are free and open to everyone. If you are planning on coming to a playgroup event and would like directions or would like to be added to the playgroup mailing list, please do not hesitate to email us at [pg.utchinacare@gmail.com](mailto:pg.utchinacare@gmail.com).

The following is a list of our playgroup dates for the upcoming semester:

- September 14, 2014
- September 28, 2014
- October 12, 2014
- October 26, 2014
- November 9, 2014

Another one of our programs is the Big Brother Big Sister Program, which is a mentorship program that encourages close companionship between a UT student volunteer and an adopted Chinese child. The pair meets up outside of China Care's playgroups for one-on-one sessions to play games and spend quality time together. It is an enriching experience, and the bond that forms between the "siblings" is truly special. If you are interested in participating in the Big Brother Big Sister Program, you can fill out an application on the Texas China Care website at [www.txchinacare.org](http://www.txchinacare.org) under the Programs tab and email it to [pg.utchinacare@gmail.com](mailto:pg.utchinacare@gmail.com) once you have finished the application.

We are looking forward to another amazing year and seeing old and new faces alike at our playgroup events! ❖

*Geneve Chin is a sophomore at UT majoring in biochemistry and is ethnically Chinese. Nathan Vu is a junior at UT majoring in electrical engineering and is ethnically Vietnamese. Both are the current playgroup co-directors of UT China Care.*

## Contact Us

If you have any questions or concerns about playgroup or the Big Brother Big Sister Program, please do not hesitate to email the playgroup directors, Geneve Chin and Nathan Vu, at [pg.utchinacare@gmail.com](mailto:pg.utchinacare@gmail.com). More information can be found at our website, [www.txchinacare.org](http://www.txchinacare.org). For updates and photos, please visit and like our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/txchinacare>. ❖

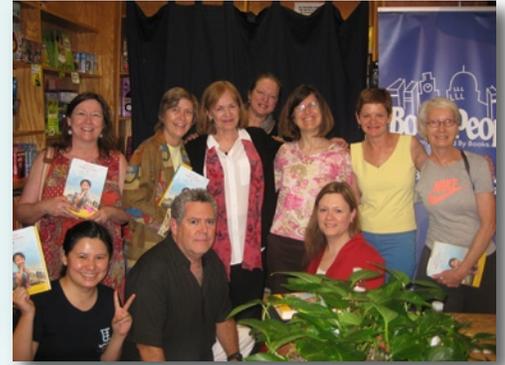


# Jenny Bowen Rocks The House!

There wasn't a dry eye in the house when Jenny Bowen did her book signing and talk at Bookpeople in late April. FCC worked hard to get her publisher to send her, and indeed it was well worth the time, as there must have been at least 60+ people in attendance.

She showed a short documentary (you can see this shorter version on Youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i45GwsmTn\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i45GwsmTn_w)) and talked about her own journey, from adopting her first child to how she realized the importance of changing the orphanage system in China. She read from the section in her book, *Wish You Happy Forever*, about her first encounter with toddlers and babies in China—and how she realized that just a good bit more love and care might go a long way to change things. She was not welcomed at first, but the government to its credit knew they had to do something—and indeed, her Half the Sky Foundation is intimately involved in training and influencing the Chinese social welfare system.

As I said: there wasn't a dry eye in the house. Read her book and you'll know why. ❖



FCC board members, parents, and volunteers at the Jenny Bowen book event.

## Walk the Wall in Austin—October 11th

By Michele Harris

There is a special opportunity for the Austin community to give life to the children, youth and young adults in China. On October 11, International China Concern ([www.chinaconcern.org](http://www.chinaconcern.org)) will be hosting a Walk the Wall event to raise awareness and life-saving funding for those in China who have not yet been adopted or who will be in the care of ICC for life.

International China Concern (ICC) is a faith-based development organization that changes lives by bringing love, hope, and opportunity to those in China who have special needs and do not have homes. For 20 years, they have been partnering with the Chinese government to develop social welfare for this vulnerable population. Their reputation and relationships in China have placed them in an excellent position to not only provide services (nutrition, therapy,



INTERNATIONAL CHINA CONCERN  
**WALK THE WALL 2014**

**AUSTIN**

STARTING LOCATION  
CENTER FOR HEALING AND REGENERATIVE MEDICINE

EVENT COORDINATOR  
**MICHELE HARRIS**  
P: 512 791 6487  
E: [michele@nextgenerationhearts.org](mailto:michele@nextgenerationhearts.org)

DATE & TIME  
**11 OCTOBER 2014**  
REGISTRATION: 9:30 AM  
START: 10 AM

REGISTER ONLINE & FOR MORE INFO  
[www.walkthewall.org](http://www.walkthewall.org)

education, medical care, and love) and homes for life, but also to empower and train Chinese nationals. Through the work of ICC, lives are being saved, families are being supported, communities are being transformed, and attitudes toward those with special needs changed.

ICC would love to have you and your families join them on October 11. Come, bring your family and friends and raise financial

support as you walk. You will get some exercise, meet some special people in Austin who have a heart and passion for China, learn about ICC and give life to those in China without families. For more information, go to [www.walkthewall.org](http://www.walkthewall.org). Or contact Michele Harris at 512-791-6487 or [michele@nextgenerationhearts.org](mailto:michele@nextgenerationhearts.org). ❖

Michele Harris is Board Chair—ICC-USA.