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RESULTS | Quantifying change

A ripple effect as benefits spread

Since the Chi Heng Foundation began its work in a village in Henan Province in 2002 with a handful of volunteers and funding from the pocket of its founder, Chung To, it has expanded its reach to more than 200 villages in eight provinces and has sent almost 12,000 children to school. Around 3,000 have now finished their education. Five hundred are now studying at universities, and around 100 are university graduates, 14 of whom now work for the foundation.

Getting a good education suited to their abilities has changed the lives of these children, most of whom had little hope for the future after members of their already-poor families had died of AIDS.

"One of our kids told me that HIV had caused him to lose his family," says To, "but it also helped him get a new family, a bigger one." The program's university graduates often stop by the regional office to ask if they can help out, while others stay in touch by e-mail or the program's alumni networks. One graduate, who majored in English, has worked for Reuters, while others have become doctors, engineers or taken up other professions.

"They stay close to us," says To, "which



Students in one of the 13 reading rooms financed by the Chi Heng Foundation.

means that they have received more than financial support. We want to provide love and care as well as education, so they will stay in touch and help the younger children. I hope they will all carry on the spirit of what we do. We are like a big family, empowering those being helped to become able to help others." He adds that after the earthquake in Sichuan in 2008, 21 of the program's university students went there to help victims.

To is also encouraged by the way others are emulating the Chi Heng Foundation's efforts. "Smaller programs are being set up in other places, some of them started by the

villages themselves and some with help from the government," he says. "It's good to see others doing the same thing."

He is hoping that the BNP Paribas Prize for Individual Philanthropy will have a similar effect: "I hope the award will help connect us to like-minded people so we can work together on some things." After he won the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2007, he says, he benefited from meeting a number of people who were able to give him valuable advice and share experiences, including a field trip to visit earlier awardees' programs in India and Thailand. ■