



# SUCCESS STORY

## TRANSFORMING LIVES...FROM MONGOLIA

There are so many times in our lives when we lose perspective in our lives and how we see the world. Usually we have moments that bring us back down to earth and we are able to appreciate the many positive things we have surrounding us. We are reminded of the many things we are grateful for. Family. Friends. Community. Life.

At Outdoors for All, we are consistently reminded of how powerful our programs can be to those we serve in our programs. AND even those who just come to learn and listen. But at the same time, we ALWAYS find equal inspiration through these experiences.

On November 1st, 2010, a handful of Outdoors for All staff had the opportunity to host ten individuals from Mongolia. Yes, you heard correctly...Mongolia! This selection of ten individuals had been nominated as upcoming leaders in their field and invited to the U.S. as guests of the Department of State on an exchange program entitled, "Disability Awareness & Communication."

Outdoors for All was selected by as a professional counterpart to what they are trying to achieve and wanted to take a moment to discuss how our outdoor programs improve the lives of our participants by providing them opportunities to ski, hike, kayak, cycle and just get outside. They also wanted to get an understanding of how our programs help volunteers to re-shape their view of what it means to have a disability and promote greater inclusion and cooperation.

We were contacted by Rachel Moshier, Program Officer for the International Visitor Program of the World Affairs Council in Seattle. Moshier got connected with us through Kristen Comer, a ski coach at Summit at Snoqualmie. We are extremely grateful for both of them for setting this session up.

The crew rolled in around 1:00PM to Magnuson Park in a charter bus. Out came the ten delegates, six individuals in wheelchairs, one with crutches and another with a cane. We all headed to our conference room and presented to them some information about our programs with the help of some wonderful interpreters.

Of course, with any presentation we usually show, the photos and videos are where you start to see a change in the audience. This amazing group was no exception to that. From talking about our annual STP Team to showing videos of our bi-skis in action, the faces lit up so much in our conference room it made it seem like we had skylights! (And for anyone who has been in our conference room... you know what we are talking about!).

Even though some of them had seen or heard of some of the adaptive equipment we use in our programs, many of them had not or had not seen the caliber of equipment we had. At this point we were not sure yet if what we were saying made sense or if we could be of any help in their cause. Short answer to that question. A resounding, "YES!"

When we asked if there were any questions, one gentleman, Udrakhbayar.Ch who works for an Independent Living Center in Mongolia said via translator, "Oh, yes. MANY."

Udrakhbayar went on to talk about how he has had the opportunity to try a bi-ski and some other forms of adaptive equipment, but he is one of very few who have. He talked at length how important it is to be active when one has a disability. That many individuals are lacking that piece about being active in their lives regardless of their disability. Mainly due to limited knowledge of what is possible and then limited access even when they do know.

In the end, they all wanted Outdoors for All staff to come to Mongolia to show individuals and the community what is possible :) One of their barriers they consistently run up against is disbelief of those they seek support from. Udrakhbayar said those they approach for support just can't visualize how it would work. They did not understand when he went to individuals in his wheelchair how HE would be able to ski. How would it be possible?

As staff we realize how much work still needs to be done here in our own disability communities, so international adaptive recreation awareness on site in another country is not something we can fit in right now but we offered our assistance in being a resource for them to help them gain support in their communities in smaller ways to start. Although we cannot fly out today, we can offer our guidance and support. From lists of adaptive equipment distributors to showing them how to access our videos online to show others the power of adaptive recreation. They were more than appreciative and wanting very much to stay in touch.

But in the end, they made it clear that they could not ask for more than what we provided them that day. A renewal in inspiration for what they are trying to achieve. To see a program like ours working and doing so many amazing things. To see that it IS possible to do the things they have been dreaming about.

And we, at Outdoors for All, thank this group for the inspiration they brought to our group. Thankful for their dedication to their disability communities. As staff we sit and reflect on this fantastic visit. Reflect on remembering how far we have come as an organization. Remind ourselves what amazing support we have in our community. Remain thankful for the support of over 700 volunteers a year who help us deliver our mission.

And we remember, as the great words of Margaret Mead echo "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

