

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC Швейцарын хөгжлийн агентлаг









YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Testimonies

Introduction

For this collection of stories, 13 young people provided their stories on how engaging with and working at Youth Development Centres (YDCs) benefitted their personal lives and shared their thoughts on how YDCs should operate to help more young people.

An important delivery channel for UNFPA's youth development interventions is the multipurpose Youth Development Centres, which were handed over to the government's ownership after successful piloting by UNFPA from 2013 to 2017.

Supported by UNFPA, YDCs are run by the Government of Mongolia to deliver services for young people to build resilience, gain life skills, and realize their potential as shapers and leaders of Mongolia's future.

YDCs offer a safe and fun space for young people to access support groups, youth participation activities, regular life skills classes, and counselling. Based on the community's needs, supplementary programmes are also offered and may include English language classes, free internet access points, and interest clubs for music, art, dance and sports.

While providing valuable development opportunities, these services also help to draw participants into the life skills training offered at the centres.

Furthermore, YDCs provide referrals to youth-friendly health services, including sexual and reproductive health education, treatment, and counselling.

Over the years, many young people, including marginalized groups, such as youth with disabilities, unemployed youth, and young mothers, received services at YDCs nationwide. They participated in life skills training at YDCs, focusing on improving their skills in communication, self-confidence, planning, decision-making, and stress management. This has contributed to young people's development, ability to adapt to new environments, and positive behaviour, enabling youth to deal more effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.



"Working at the Youth Development Centre, I learned to manage my emotions and reaction in the face of various obstacles and unpleasant situations in everyday life, and to think things through before making the right decisions to overcome problems."

My name is Janylgan Radolda. I work as youth development and education officer at the Youth Development Centre of the Family, Child and Youth Development Department in Bayan-Ulgii province. I have been working for nine years in this field. I live with my husband, father-in-law and three children in the 8th bagh of Ulgii soum. I graduated from the University of Humanities in 2011 with a degree in psychology. I like to read books and spend time with my children in my free time.

I took part in the assessment and other activities when UNFPA's Youth Development Programme team came to the province in 2013 and organized consultative meetings with stakeholders to assess and discuss the current situation of local youth, the realization of their rights, and programme implementation opportunities and potential support, which subsequently led to the centre's establishment in Bayan-Ulgii province. This means I got involved in the Youth Development Centre from the very beginning, when it was first established.

I worked as a coordinator of the Youth Development Centre since 2016 and am still working in this field. I think the centre has given me a lot of personal opportunities to develop my knowledge and skills.

By working at the Youth Development Centre, I have gained knowledge and a deeper understanding of human rights, freedoms, gender-based violence, and the basic principles of democracy.

In addition, I have developed and improved my life skills in communicating with others, appropriately expressing myself, understanding others, and becoming confident in myself. I have also had the opportunity to develop leadership skills in planning, coordinating, engaging and monitoring.

In other words, the Youth Development Centre has improved and enhanced my humanity. Working at the Youth Development Centre, I learned to manage my emotions and reaction in the face of various obstacles and unpleasant situations in everyday life and to think things through before making the right decisions to overcome problems.

As a result, I have not had any difficulty dealing with family problems, work, or other environments.

Of course, the Youth Development Centre should continue because there are very few places where young people, especially youth in rural areas, can come together to work, develop themselves, and spend their free time properly. The centre provides an environment that supports young people with sincere aspirations to establish themselves and learn new things.

To increase the effectiveness of the Youth Development Centre's activities in future, I think it is necessary to increase local government support, improve people's attitudes towards the centre, and expand its material resources.

Lanylgan. K



"When I found out that there was a Youth Development Centre operating Locally, I tried to spend as much of my Free time as possible there after school." My name is Bagdaulet Darger. I am a regular student living in a rented apartment in Ulaanbaatar with fellow students from my province. I successfully graduated from the 1st Secondary School of Ulgii soum, Bayan-Ulgii province.

In 2021 and entered the Mongolian University of Science and Technology to pursue a study in civil engineering. But for now, I'm studying English as part of the "Future of 21st Century Mongolia - 2,100 students" programme initiated by the President of Mongolia. I plan to go abroad in the fall of next year to earn a bachelor's degree and return home to work.

When I found out that there was a Youth Development Centre operating locally, I tried to spend as much of my free time as possible there after school. This is because I had so much to learn at the centre.

In particular, the centre provided great opportunities for personal development.

The centre helped me develop leadership skills and myself on multiple levels. It also helped me to improve my communication skills and language skills.

In my opinion, the centre should continue operating as it is the place and environment young people need the most in today's society. Moreover, the Youth Development Centre is very helpful for young people to learn at the time and acquire new skills required for competing with young people worldwide.

To increase the productivity of the Youth Development Centre, I think the service hall needs to be expanded to serve as many people as possible and focus on organizing youth-oriented clubs.

Bagdaulet. D



"Working at the Youth Development Centre, I understood the importance of an environment that embraces diversity and differences." My name is Dorjnamjilmaa Dagvarenchin. I live with my husband and son in Darkhan city.

I have worked as a coordinator at the Youth Development Centre in Darkhan since 2012.

Through my experience working at the centre, I learned a lot personally through life-skills education, reproductive health, family planning and volunteer engagements. Thanks to these experiences, I have become a more active citizen in society.

Although I graduated from the Darkhan University of Technology as a hygienist, I have worked as a social worker for eight years at the Youth Development Centre. This experience has also led me to pursue a study in psychology purely out of my passion for contributing to social development through engaging and helping others.

Since working at the Youth Development Centre, I have learned and continue to learn about volunteering. When we first started working at the Youth Development Centre, we worked with children, students, young people with disabilities, and LGBTI youth. At that time, LGBT youth were not well understood in society and were discriminated against. Through my work at the centre, I met a beautiful boy who is gay. I tried to help him build his confidence and enable him to express himself positively.

In addition, I trained him as a peer educator, youth coordinator, and human rights activist, and I tried to make him realise his place in society and become resilient.

Now he works for a large mining company.

If it weren't for the Youth Development Centre, I think it would have been tough for me to understand the concept of inequality and influence society.

Working at the Youth Development Centre, I understood the importance of an environment that embraces diversity and differences.

I think it's essential to have a fire to light, not to turn off other people's light. So there is an urgent need for Youth Development Centre's services. Young people have many problems. They are making mistakes in life due to a lack of knowledge in family planning. In addition, some are being ostracized because of a lack of understanding of the differences of others.

Young people can make mistakes, and young people can make the right decisions. Therefore, the Youth Development Centre should be there to guide the youth in their lives.

Dorjnaljirmaa. D



"I CANNOT HELP BUT BE PROUD OF THE MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH COUNCIL AT THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTRE. TALENTED YOUNG PEOPLE CAME TOGETHER TO RAISE THEIR VOICES FOR THE WELL-BEING OF SOCIETY AND WORKED TOGETHER HARMONIOUSLY ON MANY PROJECTS."

My name is Erkhemayar Tumenjargal. I'm a representative at the Citizen Representative Council of Gobi-Altai province, director of the Gobi-Altai Province Innovation, Research, Business Development Centre, and head of the Youth Development Specialists' Union.

Since the Youth Development Centre opened in Gobi-Altai province in October 2014, I have worked as the centre's coordinator until now. Through its work, the centre has established youth councils, support groups, and a variety of youth participation clubs, increasing and expanding youth participation and implementing large-scale community outreach projects.

Overall, these can be viewed as effective and impactful interventions that improved the active involvement of the youth, motivating, inspiring and garnering the interest of local young people and the centre staff.

During the project period, UNFPA's quarterly personal development and life skills module training was a significant investment in the centre staff. In addition, the centre offered a platform for talented young people from 11 provinces and six districts to learn from each other and create an extensive network of youth development in Mongolia.

I cannot help but be proud of the members of the Youth Council at the Youth Development Centre. Talented young people came together to raise their voices for the well-being of society and worked together harmoniously on many projects. At the end of the project, these young people formed the Association of Youth Development Professionals, which opened the door for them to continue to support each other and become good friends in life.

These also opened the door for many young people to run for the local elections in hopes of participating in the decision-making process. I believe UNFPA's Youth Development Programme has tremendously contributed to Mongolia's youth development. Since the programme's inception, many positive changes have been made in the legal sphere of youth development.

For instance, the Law on Youth Development was adopted, the Government's Youth Policy was passed, and the government agency in charge of youth affairs was established. These indicate that the government started to care for youth and that the times when young people were seen as inexperienced and ignorant have changed. The government has begun to realise that the youth is the main driving force of development.

Thanks to the centre, tangible investments were made in young people's lives at the local level. Through the centre, we adopted and implemented the "Altai's wealth" youth development programme; supported youth employment and entrepreneurship by organising various startup competitions and interventions.

In addition, the youth support groups are working together to explore opportunities to engage families and seek ways to run small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Youth Development Centre was very active and effective between 2014 and 2017, when UNFPA supported the centre with its projects. However, since then, the centre's operational effectiveness has declined yearly after the government took ownership.

To increase the centre's effectiveness, UNFPA needs to monitor the centre's operation regularly and request the government agency in charge of the centres to send reports on the centre's operation regularly.

In addition, UNFPA should consider undertaking interventions to empower young people, mentor trained young people, and coordinate with other youth-led initiatives.

Erkhembayar. T



"AT THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, I
WOULD INTERACT WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF
PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AND
ATTITUDES ON A DAILY BASIS, WHICH
ENABLED ME TO DEVELOP MY
COMMUNICATION AND TEAMWORK SKILLS."

My name is Enkhee Dorjderem. I work as a Clerk at MONTSAME news agency. I live with my younger brother in Ulaanbaatar.

After graduating from university in 2010, I lived and worked in my hometown in Dornogovi province for 12 years.

During this time, I worked in the public sector, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. However, the most memorable job I was passionate about was the time I worked as a social worker at the Youth Development Centre of Dornogobi for four years.

During my time at the Youth Development Centre, I learned a lot from a training series for staff development and rediscovered myself. As a result, I think I developed gender sensitivity, learned to embrace differences, and, in general, changed my perspectives about many things.

At the Youth Development Centre, I would interact with a wide variety of people with different perspectives and attitudes on a daily basis, which enabled me to develop my communication and teamwork skills.

The skills I gained while working at the centre continue to pay off in my personal life and at work. Therefore, there is a great need for Youth Development Centre's services, especially in rural areas and soums.

The centre has brought many positive changes to the youth since its establishment.

There are many great stories of youth who benefitted from the centre's services succeeding in their life and career. Thanks to the centre, a positive culture was created where young people develop themselves and spend their time wisely.

In the eight years since the centre was established in Dornogobi, I think many positive changes have taken place on a small or large scale.

In the future, the centre needs to focus on maintaining its skilled human resources.

During my time at the centre, UNFPA's Youth Development Programme would carry out regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure the quality of services and a great deal of attention was paid to the centre's smooth operation. However, I noticed that the centre's service quality had weakened after the government took ownership.

Therefore, I think it is critical to monitor and evaluate the process of maintaining the previous results even after the project's conclusion.

Enkhee.



"AS A PLATFORM FOR SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND
A DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR MANY
YOUNG PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN RURAL
AREAS, THE CENTRE MUST CONTINUE AND ITS
SERVICES SHOULD REACH MORE YOUTH."

My name is Garysh Abyjat. I live with my parents, wife and children in Bayan-Ulgii province. I work as a specialist at the provincial Family, Children, and Youth Development Department (FCYDD). I provide training and lectures on family values, relationships, positive parenting, personal development, and youth development and participation.

Working at the Youth Development Centre, I discovered and developed myself and increased awareness and positive attitudes toward human rights, gender, youth development and participation, and individual responsibility for social well-being. I was first offered a job as an active member of the centre's council, then employed as a full-time employee of the centre, and eventually as a specialist at the provincial FCYDD.

In other words, I first came to the centre to develop myself, but ended up fully employed at the centre and started my work with the youth.

My experience working at the centre has instilled in me a positive attitude of being aware of human rights and gender differences, embracing differences, taking into account differences in differently-abled persons, and listening to the voices of minorities in my everyday interactions. I always try to take these into account when undertaking any intervention. As a platform for self-development and a development opportunity for many young people, especially those in rural areas, the centre must continue and its services should reach more youth.

To increase the centre's effectiveness, mentoring leadership programmes for rural youth need to be established to reach more young people.

Garysh. D



"A YOUTH-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT AND FRIENDLY SERVICE DELIVERY ARE ESSENTIAL TO INSTILLING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE, BEHAVIOUR, INDEPENDENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY."

I am Khishigtogtokh. I live with my husband and three children in Khovd province, the birthplace of many ethnic groups.

During my time at the Youth Development Centre, I worked with many organizations and young people on various activities, including interest clubs, support groups, psychological counselling, and life skills training. Because of this experience, getting back in touch and working with them is now easier.

I made many acquaintances and friends while working at the centre. In addition, I advanced to a certain level in terms of personal and professional skills while working at the centre. Therefore, I think it has positively impacted both my work and life.

When a client attending psychological counselling said, "Your profession is wonderful because it transforms suffering into happiness," I was apprehensive, thinking that I had to meet my client's high expectations. I tried my best to learn every day to deliver a professional service to my clients by setting a high standard.

Although there have been many positive developments and outcomes for the support groups for psychological counselling, there have been instances where expectations were not met.

One example of a positive result is when I witnessed one of my clients. This teenager had harmed themself, overcame not only their problems with the help of psychological services but also became a peer influencer.

I was very proud of my client and my profession at that time. I will continue striving to add light to more people's hearts.

Between the ages of 15 and 34, young people make important choices that will affect their future lives, such as choosing a job or career and making family plans.

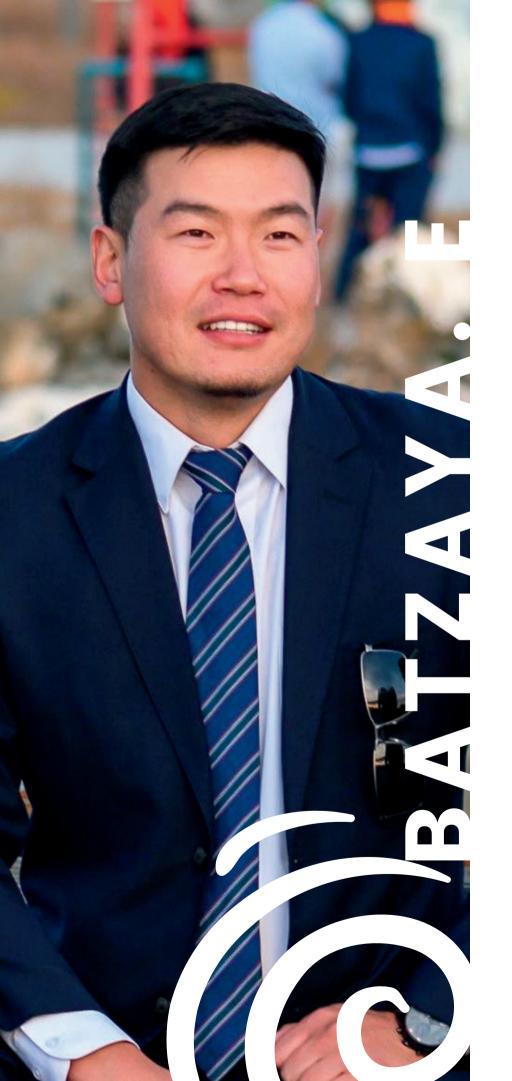
At this age, peer influence, learning environment, and professional counselling are essential, so that young people can work together to meet their needs, unite their voices for their interests, and address their issues through support groups and counselling services.

I believe I contributed to giving these opportunities to young people through my work at the Youth Development Centre.

The need for these services, which targets one-third of the population of Mongolia, will continue to exist. However, as society changes and technology advances, the needs and interests of adolescents and young people are also changing rapidly. Therefore, everyone in this field needs to be very careful about the needs and requirements of the people we serve, plan service delivery thoroughly, be sensitive and pay attention not only to the availability of services but also to the impact and positive changes of the services.

A youth-friendly environment and friendly service delivery are essential to instilling a positive attitude, behaviour, independence and responsibility. In addition, I think that the effectiveness of the work will increase if the work results are evaluated by changes brought to the people we serve rather than what is reported on paper.

Khishigtogtokh. S



"THE FACT THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE
POPULATION ARE YOUNG PEOPLE CAN BE SEEN AS
A HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY. HOWEVER, THERE ARE
STILL MANY ISSUES FACING YOUNG PEOPLE."

My name is Batzaya Erdenebat. I live with my wife and two children in Bayankhongor soum of Bayankhongor province. I am an information technology engineer by profession. However, I run my own business at the moment. I also serve as a representative of the Bayankhongor Province Citizens' Representative Khural and as a member of the aimag council.

As in other parts of the world, the youth are the main driver of Mongolia's development and form the majority of the social structure. In the case of our country, the fact that the majority of the population are young people can be seen as a historic opportunity. However, there are still many issues facing young people.

While working at the Youth Development Centre, I had a chance to experience first-hand the many challenges the youth face in terms of quality education, vocational training, employment, health, social security, social participation, and a proper leisure environment. Therefore, the fact that I ran for the 8th local election in 2020 and was elected as the representative in the Citizens' Representative Khural was out of my passion not just for observing but for participating as much as I can, for expressing the voices of young people, and for the recognition of their value.

Thanks to the Youth Development Centre, I noticed many areas for improvement in all sectors. Therefore, in adition to my main tasks at the centre, I volunteered whenever the time permitted.

Volunteering enabled me to acquire many life skills, such as understanding and loving others, determining my life goals, feeling for my community, and seeing opportunities to contribute to society.

In addition to personal development opportunities at the centre, the everyday interactions with social issues through the projects implemented at the centre gave me the will to seek solutions to the problems. When involved in the decision-making process on behalf of those we serve, acknowledging that you do not know more than the benefactors or getting to "know what you don't know" is a very important concept and is probably the highlight of my experience working at the centre.

The centre must continue operating. Its operation is also specified and sustained in the Law on Youth Development. However, as mentioned above, the environment for young people to spend their free time and come together to share their interests and issues remains unequal and unreachable to some extent. Therefore, government policies aimed at adolescents and youth, the majority of Mongolia's population, must continue to improve.

Increasing the participation of young people in the decision-making process, undertaking regular interventions to recognize the value of youth in society, and listening to them should be a priority.

Batzaya. E



"THE EXPERIENCE OF WORKING AT THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTRE HELPED ME GET THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT SCHOLARSHIP." My name is Lkhagvasuren Lamjav, and I am a social worker by profession. I live with my husband and two children.

Currently, I am working as a programme officer for the "Entrepreneurship-Focused Socio-Emotional Skills for The Most Vulnerable Youth In Rural Mongolia" project at Save the Children.

By working at the Youth Development Centre in Orkhon province, I learned to work more professionally with young people and developed the skill set needed to interact and work with various social groups.

In addition, the experience of working at the Youth Development Centre helped me get an Australian government scholarship in 2017. This is because UNFPA's Youth Development Programme was the first in Mongolia to address youth issues at the policy level and to establish a government unit in charge of youth issues.

The Youth Development Centre must continue to provide services in the future. However, the right approach and methodology should be in place to sustain the centre.

With advocacy efforts and close partnership with the government, the project created a new government unit for youth affairs to ensure the sustainability of youth development projects.

However, there has been a noticeable lack of effective and innovative approaches to reaching young people since the completion of the programme.

Therefore, this weakened the Youth Development Centre's services, which has been sustained as one small unit of an overly large government organisation.

Working with young people requires an unconventional mindset and an innovative, participatory approach that seeks to meet the different needs of diverse communities so that no one is left behind.

Development is achieved by the person who strives for it. It is impossible to control human development from the outside, as though watering flowers. Therefore, we need to pay more attention to making Youth Development Centres more open and multi-stakeholder oriented.

Ikhagvasuren. L



"THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTRE SHOULD GUIDE AND EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD AT THE GOVERNMENT LEVEL AND PARTICIPATE IN DEVELOPING THEIR COUNTRY."

My name is Erkhembayar Togtuur. I live with my wife and three children in Ulaangom soum of Uvs province. I am a lawyer.

From 2014-to 2016, I worked as a project coordinator atthe Youth Development Centre under the Family, Child and Youth Development Department of Uvs province.

In 2021, I was elected as the governor of the 2nd bagh of Ulaangom soum, and I am working in this position for the second term.

I started my career at the Youth Development Centre. Working at the Youth Development Centre taught me many skills. It laid the foundation for me to advance in my career. I am grateful to the Youth Development Centre and the UNFPA team, which implemented this programme in the first place, for giving thousands of young people like me the right path to a productive life and work.

At first, I lacked communication skills and couldn't express myself to others. I gained these skills by working at the Youth Development Centre. Now I can express myself freely in front of anyone.

The main reason for continuing the activities of the Youth Development Centre would be that in today's society, young people need to participate in decision-making, raise their voices and actively participate in the community. Unfortunately, thousands of young people do not know how to participate in decision-making, have their voices heard, and participate in the development of their country.

The Youth Development Centre should guide and empower young people on how to make their voices heard at the government level and participate in their country's development. As such, the centre should continue to provide services.

To further reap the benefits of the Youth Development Centre, it is crucial to increase youth participation, and provide multi-faceted training and capacity building for young people. It must continue to create opportunities for young people to participate in government activities and raise their voices, and educate young people about the importance participation at the decision-making level.

Erkhembayar. T



"THE LIFE SKILLS MODULE AT THE YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT CENTRE INSPIRED ME TO EXPRESS
MYSELF AND ENABLED ME TO DEVELOP GOOD
RELATIONSHIPS."

My name is Amartuvshin Lkhagvajav. I was born in Uliastai soum of Zavkhan province and I live with my parents. I like to do crafts and embroidery. Currently, I work in the Atar-Arvai bakery in Uliastai soum.

I think the life skills module at the Youth Development Centre has had the most significant impact on my ability to express myself to others and has become one of the most critical skills in my current job. I am also grateful for having learned how to deal with stress and having acquired communication skills, which I still use in my personal life and work.

The life skills module at the Youth Development Centre has inspired me to express myself and enabled me to develop good relationships.

I think development services, such as self-development, networking and collaboration, and bringing together young people's perspectives, are essential for developing self-confidence and team building.

The Youth Development Centre has such a tremendous impact on the youth that there is a need to continue its provision of critical services to the youth.

Dmartwoshin.



"I WISH TO CONTINUE WORKING AT THE CENTRE
TO DEVELOP MYSELF FURTHER WHILE PROVIDING
NECESSARY SERVICES TO THE YOUTH."

My name is Ulaanaa Bayaraa. I live with my father in Tsogttsetsii soum of Umnugobi province.

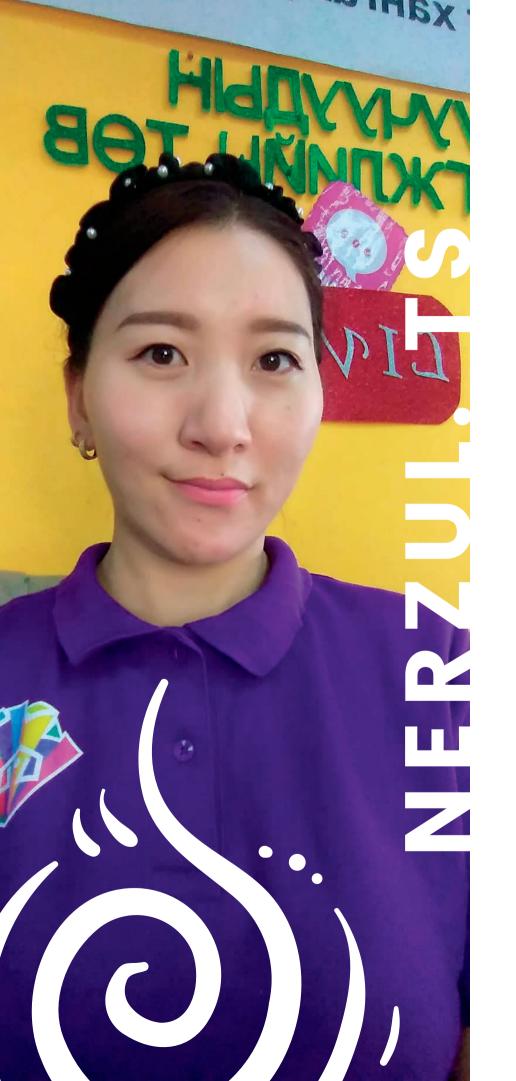
I completed my secondary education in 2015 and started working at the Youth Development Centre of Tsogtsetsiim soum in the same year. Before working at the centre, I struggled to communicate with people and properly express myself to others. I also lacked teamwork skills. However, working at the centre, I developed my skills in communicating and self-expression, which helped me to gain leadership skills.

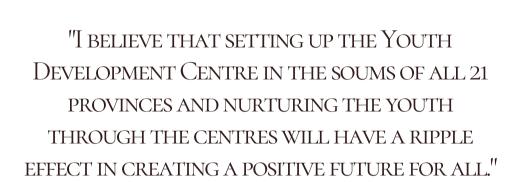
I wish to continue working at the centre to develop myself further while providing necessary services to the youth.

I think the Youth Development Centre should strengthen its work by closely coordinating with the government and non-government organizations.

This way, the centre can provide the necessary services to the youth and serve as a bridge between the local government and the youth to address the issues faced by the youth.

Maanaa. B





My name is Nerzul Tsoodol. I live with my husband and daughter in Khanbogd soum of Umnugobi province.

I started working as the officer in charge of inclusivity and collaboration at the Youth Development Centre in 2019, and this is my third year at the centre.

Now I work as a youth development officer at the centre. I am a Chinese language teacher by profession. In addition, I have a master's degree in family studies and am a professional career coach.

I pride myself on working at the Youth Development Centre and am inspired and energized by what I do at the centre. The centre has opened up many opportunities for my personal development and life and has made positive changes. For instance, I gained self-confidence and a sense of responsibility working at the centre, all of which inspired me to improve my social participation, lead the youth toward working and supporting each other, and become a bridge for their voices and do more for society. By doing so, I could clarify my position in society and learn and develop personally by gaining the necessary experience, mobilizing myself, and innovating.

By being involved in all services provided at the centre, such as life skills training, clubs, support group activities, council activities, referral services, psychological counselling, and career choice counselling, I am continuously learning and gaining much experience. The knowledge and experiences acquired at the centre make it easier for me to cope with and overcome my challenges. They equip me with the ability to help my family, siblings, and relatives positively.

Beneficiaries of the centre's services will be able to have a positive impact not only on their own life but on their family, friends, relatives and acquaintances. Therefore, I believe that setting up the Youth Development Centre in the soums of all 21 provinces and nurturing the youth through the centres will have a ripple effect in creating a positive future for all.

To increase the efficiency of the Youth Development Centre, it is a priority to increase the staff working at the Youth Development Centre and to ensure that they have good living and working conditions.

It's not possible for two or three people to ensure the rights and development of all the young people aged 15-34 in their locale and work to tackle social issues related to youth.

The work overload coupled with low salary might adversely impact the staff, leading them to lose interest in their job and eventually quit. This, unfortunately, is an everyday reality.

Although young people working in the Youth Development Centre are trained and developed as trainers in many areas, it is unfortunate that they are quitting their jobs due to workload and low salary issues. This creates an unproductive cycle of doing the same with new employees by starting over and over again, compromising results that benefit the people we serve.

Nerzul. Ts