



the past year with the support of charity Caritas Macau. Two pre-school children remain in the village and Xun is concerned about their education. Ma Chan once had a school but it closed when the only teacher prepared to visit the village stopped doing so.

Now that charities are supporting the hamlet, Xun is determined to make sure the children do not suffer the same stigma as their parents. "I want to see all our children educated and able to move to the city," he says. He no longer thinks of Ma Chan as a leper colony. "I think of it as an ordinary village."

But it is a village cut off from local trade and most of the outside world. Residents have had no choice but to learn to be self-sufficient. Although the local government gives 300 to 400 catties of rice to each person every year and there are occasional donations of tea, eggs and meat, villagers survive by growing root crops in summer and eating dried foods in winter. They eat chicken and pork 10 times a year but their staple diet is turnips, eggs, other vegetables and rice.

The last person to join the community was Ding Zhu, 26, who contracted leprosy five years ago. An orphan, he was sent to Ma Chan after being rejected by his own village. Now cured, Ding, who is uneducated and has only basic farming skills, considers Ma Chan home. "I would leave if I could but I don't have any money and I would be discriminated against," he says. "No, this is my home now."

The remote, tough existence is perhaps hardest on the young adults whose parents were leprosy sufferers. Although they've never had the disease, these twenty-somethings have been as isolated from the modern world as their shunned elders.

Zhang Liying, 21, looks almost fashionable in her woollen hat and denim jacket. In stark contrast to most of the villagers, the pretty young woman would

not look out of place in image-conscious Shanghai. But, uneducated and with a four-year-old son, Qili Nima, to raise, she is trapped in Ma Chan. Zhang had no schooling until she was 17, when she received two years of primary education from a teacher supplied by Caritas. "If I had the opportunity I would like to leave the village and study to become a doctor," she says shyly. "But I don't know how I could do that." >>

**Above: Zhang Liying and her four-year-old son. Below and right: living conditions in the hamlet are primitive.**

