Who Actually Runs Child’s Dream?

Marc T. Jenni
Co-Founder & Managing Director Operations

Some of our readers might remember Daniel’s and my struggle five years ago when we realised that Child’s Dream, as an organisation, was outgrowing the direct management style of the two of us. Back then, our implementation work as well as our donation volume had reached a level of significance that it became unavoidable that decision taking and making had to be shared and delegated to the next level. One can compare this situation to when a child reaches puberty and suddenly the influence of its parents gets challenged. It must be an uneasy feeling for parents to see children becoming independent adults, but for us it was a feeling of great satisfaction to see our brain child succeed and become strong and impactful. Not only our organisation matured, but also some of our key staff had grown tremendously over time, so it was a logical step to appoint a Management Committee (MC) to be in charge of increasingly running the ‘show’ on a day to day basis. Hence, January 2015 marked the birth of a newly established operational management level, consisting of our six most senior colleagues in the region. It was a must for us that the composition of the MC reflected not just the knowledge of our project implementation work, but also of all aspects of operation, e.g. controlling, HR, finance etc. With mixed feelings, and a time frame of five years to grow into this new role, we sent them off, keenly awaiting to see how everything would evolve. Again, letting a teenager run independently creates some challenges and exactly the same thing happened between our MC and us. We quickly realised that some of the changes made or proposed reflected the more personal desires and needs of our colleagues, including the MC members, instead of the true and best intention for the organisation. We sometimes joked and compared the MC with a labour union rather than a management committee, but luckily things improved. It also took a while for the MC to get used to working together as a team for the benefit of Child’s Dream. We certainly supported the MC during the first two years of its existence by guiding and
We have adopted the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 ‘Partnership for the Goals’ as an indirect SDG Goal of our strategy, as we strongly believe in building long-term and trustworthy relationships with our project partners. These partnerships go far beyond just providing funding for activities to reach a shared goal. We work with our partners to formulate a common strategy, as well as support their capacity building to improve their organisational management and to increase the impact of their work.

For instance, in our health focus group we facilitate targeted workshops for our health partners annually. Last May we organised a 5-day project management workshop with the help of Community Partners International (CPI) for all our health partners in Myanmar. Since the topic of the training was not explaining why we would have decided differently and what values we would have put behind certain changes and decisions. It was important for us to see a steep learning curve while the MC worked on the improvement of internal processes as well as directives, guidelines and manuals. Two years later, we were satisfied that the MC had evolved into a responsible management body, representing not only the wishes and intentions of Daniel and myself, but also of the organisation as a whole. Rebranding the MC into the MT, meaning Management Team, was the next logical step for us. It was not just a rebranding, but also a giving of additional responsibilities and greater financial empowerment. And as you would expect, the learning curve kept on pointing upwards, turning the MT into what it is today, close to five years later: a powerful and efficient management team handling our day to day operations. Daniel and I are happy that the experiment was successful and that our teenager became a well performing and responsible adult. Today, the MT consists of the following members (only five after the retirement of Manuela end of last year): Tai – Director Basic Education, Thomas – Director Higher Education, Yem – Director Cambodia, Khin Cho – Director Myanmar and Christin – Director Finance & Operations. At the end of this year Khin Cho will be replaced by Win Pa Pa, who is gradually taking over the country directorship in Myanmar, in order for Khin Cho to reduce her working time to 50%.

Some of you might now wonder what Daniel and I are doing the whole day long and what our future looks like. Rest assured that we both have more work than ever before. The environment in which we are operating is changing faster and is more challenging than ever before, hence staying on top ‘strategically’ takes a lot more of our time. After all, we want to make sure we are addressing the needs of our current and future beneficiaries in the most efficient and effective way possible. I dare say that fundraising has not become easier and we do need more money for our ever growing pool of needy beneficiaries. A significant amount of time, therefore, is spent on this important task. Here you can all help us: the easier we get funds, the more time we can dedicate to our implementation work and the further improvement of our efficiency. We have now started the 17th year with Child’s Dream since our humble beginning in summer 2003 and our motivation and dedication has never been higher. If one has the best ‘job’ in the world, all one can hope for is to stay healthy and strong so that we can keep going for yet another 20 plus years, serving countless beneficiaries and communities in need.

From The Field

Working in Long-Term Partnerships

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During the first quarter of the year, the Basic Education team reconstructed the baselines for the School Building Programme and the Boarding House Programme. Baseline data is an important aspect of Monitoring and Evaluation, as it provides the project managers with a benchmark for measuring project success and failure. After all, if you do not know where you are, how can you know where you are going? The baselines elaborated will be used for comparing and tracking changes and will provide a useful comparison when assessing programme outcomes. This year the Basic Education team will evaluate and follow up more than 100 infrastructures across our four countries of operation. These evaluations will be systematically compared to the respective baselines and an impact report will be generated. The overall aim is to effectively measure impact and to set future programme targets. A big thanks goes to the Basic Education team for their commitment and effort!

Unlike most larger international development grants, which are tied to a very strict timeline of 3 – 5 years normally, Child’s Dream prefers to engage in longer-term partnerships that allow us to work alongside our partners to address not only the long-term needs of the beneficiaries, but also the empowerment of our partners better to address those needs.
At the end of this academic year, during March and April, Thomas and Tamalar Lin made a round of visits to refugee camp colleges for the graduation ceremonies. They visited Mae La Camp (Leadership and Management Training College, Pu Taw Memorial Junior College), Umpiem Camp (Kaw Lah Junior College), and Nupo Camp (Pu Dooplaya Junior College) in Tak Province. Then they visited Tham Hin Camp (Tanawthari Junior College) in Ratchaburi Province. Next, Tamalar Lin continued on to visit Mae Ra Ma Luang Camp (Ma Ra Moe Junior College) and Mae La Oon Camp (Northern Karen Junior College) in Mae Hong Son Province. This marked the end of a decade of support for camp education.

At the graduation ceremonies, either Thomas or Tamalar Lin gave an ‘encouragement’ speech to the outgoing students. It was a particularly useful time to visit the camps because Child’s Dream’s 5-year transition plan came to an end on 31 May 2019. As Myanmar continues to open and reform under relatively new civilian leadership, Child’s Dream has pursued a strategy of encouraging and promoting transition of exiled and refugee organisations to return or set up activities in Myanmar. During the past 5 years, we have worked with each camp school, the Karen Refugee Committee – Education Entity (Karen education authority in camps), as well as with the Karen Education Department (Karen education authority in Karen areas in Myanmar) to assist schools to develop their own transition plans. Child’s Dream then extended support for those schools that had approved transition plans to Myanmar. Those that wished to remain behind in camp needed to seek alternative support in years 3, 4 and 5 of the transition as those years saw a planned step-down in funding by Child’s Dream.

As of June 2019, Child’s Dream will only be supporting those approved schools which have transitioned and are operating in Myanmar, but not schools operating in refugee camps. We are very proud of the system in the camps over the past decades and look forward to continuing in Myanmar towards a sustainable future.
When I think back to when I started working with Child’s Dream 15 years ago, I realise that I have been in this job for almost half of my life, as I was only 25 at the time! We have gone through many milestones and developments together and, at times, they have had to create new position after new position for me because we had never had such roles before. I have gotten older with this organisation and am beginning to think that I may well die with it... hahaha!

My life with Child’s Dream has been like the weather: sometimes cloudy with very strong winds and heavy rain; other times, all sunshine and blue skies. I have gone through many difficult situations and different feelings, with many important decisions for my life and family taken here, together with support from Marc and Daniel.

I see myself as an older sister to CD: in the beginning I was the only one; later on we had more people to help take care as Child’s Dream grew. Now it has become a 16 year-old teenager, who has its own opinions and lots of confidence. I am very proud of this young adult and how we have grown with it. Child’s Dream has become very strong and very good in many respects, and really has a big impact, as I have seen with my own eyes throughout my 15 years working here.

I would like to thank Marc and Daniel, who gave me the opportunity to have this career for such a long time. Thanks to all my team and colleagues, working together and making CD as strong as it is today.

Charuwan Phaisantham (Tai)
Director - Basic Education
Voice of a Volunteer
Aidan McAuliffe, 34, Volunteer – Administration, Chiang Mai, Thailand

“Child’s Dream offered me an insight into the operations of large-scale projects, and I leave this role with new knowledge, a greater vision, and a fuller heart.”


Volunteer with us http://childs-dream.org/engage/volunteer/

Issaya Siamese Club
Generous Donation

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Issaya Siamese Club for their very generous donation and for continuing to believe in our mission of improving health and education for sustainable development.

Together we can make a difference!

BESSC Career Fair
with SilkAir Staff

On 03 May, two staff members from SilkAir Airline kindly took part, once again, in our High School Scholarship half-day Career Fair at Pich Chenda High School in Battambang Province, Cambodia. With 255 students participating in the event, the booth, laid out with booklets and gifts, was crowded with the imminent graduates enthusiastically asking questions to learn about careers and potential employment opportunities.

Many thanks to SilkAir for putting in time to share with the students.

Child’s Dream Celebrates Songkran

Before taking off time for the Songkran (Thai New Year) holiday, a merit-making ceremony was held at Child’s Dream on the morning of Friday, April 12. Buddhist monks were invited, and as part of the ritual, the monks chanted blessings and sprinkled holy water around the office.

The staff also got to pour lustral waters (Rot Nam Dam Hua) as an act of paying respect to the elders [Marc, David, and also Max and Jacqueline Mueller], done by gently dripping scented water over their hands. The celebration ended with a chat and nice food for lunch.
Double Weddings

Since Child’s Dream, as an organisation, seems to be reproductively challenged (not health wise, but rather due to our diversity), we are happy that recently two of our colleagues raced each other into marriage. Moe Kyaw and Laweh, both from our Basic Education team based in Myanmar, got married in February and May this year respectively. We wish them lots of marital happiness and lots of babies for a new generation of change makers.