Operational Excellence

I remember well the beginning of Child’s Dream in our very first office on Patan Road in Chiang Mai. This was not just our office, but also our first home in Thailand, equipped with a fully functioning kitchen. The kitchen came handy since the daily lunch break could just take place a few centimeters from our desk. Yes, desk! Daniel and I shared one desk at our humble beginnings in 2003. We did not only share a desk, we also shared a very slow dial up internet line. Since I’m famous for being an email junkie, it was my daily privilege to download the emails first. This task took me roughly an hour (since I also sneaked around in the daily newspapers) until an impatient Daniel demanded the cable. I obeyed, disconnected the dial up line, unplugged the cable and resentfully handed this precious piece of IT equipment over to Daniel. Then it was his turn to go online. Quite regularly and to my amusement, the dial up connection’s credit balance entered a critically low level until the line was cut. Back then, the usage was counted in minutes and not in mega bites downloaded. What followed was a quiet hour for me in a lonely office since Daniel had to travel across the city to buy a new internet scratch card, giving us access to another couple of hours on the internet.

We have come a long way since the early days of Child’s Dream. Occupying a building with 30 fully equipped desks shows a totally different picture. It’s not just the 30 desks, but also the 30 desktop computers or laptops which are all connected to a highly sophisticated computer server system. It goes without saying that the server and, therefore, all computers and laptops are connected to a dedicated and not shared high speed internet line, either via a LAN cable or wirelessly. Not only is the computer server in a locked and air-conditioned room, triggering some jealous remarks from our staff during the peak of the hot season in August, the server is also constantly backed up and mirrored on a second machine in Daniel’s house, quite a distance away. Our travelling staff are able to remotely and securely connect to the server in Chiang Mai from the most remote corners of our work. As you can see, IT systems and security are also vital for not-for-profit organisations such as ours. It does not stop here when it comes to our IT infrastructure, but I don’t want to bother our readers with details I long ago failed to fully understand.

Most donors associate an NGO only with its project and programme work, mostly neglecting or forgetting that a very strong administrative backbone is absolutely vital to the survival of the organisation. At Child’s Dream we have always put a strong emphasis on Operational Excellency, meaning that we pay special attention to our administration backbone. We do not just pay attention to hiring and grooming the most capable people for these positions; it has always been very clear to us that highly sophisticated IT systems need to be in place to support our project and programme managers. As we grew, the need for more structured workflows and more financial and operational control became critical and this had to be supported by more sophisticated IT systems. Over the last 24 months, we have been able to upgrade our four most important databases to levels which are, in our opinion, leading in our industry. We all know that investment in IT infrastructure and IT programmes bears a heavy price tag, normally unaffordable to NGOs. We are extremely happy and pleased that there are donors and volunteers at hand who understand the need for Operational Excellence and support NGOs like ours in fulfilling their mission more efficiently and more professionally. A big thank you goes to apVentures in Singapore as well as to Michel Dejolier.

Marc Jenni
Co-founder
Welcome and Goodbye

The end of 2012 unfortunately saw our two highly productive and creative volunteers, Laura Frick (volunteer special tasks) and Dominique Ghilardi (graphic designer), go back to snowy Europe. Many thanks for their wonderful contribution and the endless laughs we shared. In November 2012, IT genius Michel Dejolier and Liliya Pogodina, our second graphic designer, joined us in our office in Chiang Mai while Jim Engle started teaching English at Samoeng Pittayakhom School, all three of them as volunteers. January 2013 saw another two new people joining Child’s Dream: Sreylin Chum, our new Assistant Field Coordinator in Siem Reap, Cambodia; and Pamela Lewis, our new volunteer for special tasks in Chiang Mai. Moe, who started working with us early September 2012, is now working for Child’s Dream out of Yangon, Myanmar. Our newest Child’s Dream Ambassador is Prof. Dr. Francis Waldvogel from Geneva who formerly acted as a diversethics Foundation board member. Peter Barta, Maneewan Karehae and Saranyu Kladsawad just joined us in early March as volunteer and interns respectively. A warm welcome to everyone!

Child’s Dream Documentary
— Two Banker’s search for meaning!

What a success it was! We were thrilled that, after weeks of extensive shooting and months of cutting and re-cutting of over 70 hours of film material, our 50 minute documentary was finally aired on Swiss Television at the beginning of January. Overnight we got hundreds of emails and facebook messages and it took us days to answer all the very positive feedback, but this was a pleasure to do. We received not only a lot of positive feedback, but also got to know interesting and like-minded people. Many told us that they were inspired by our story and now finally have the courage to change their own lives. What additionally was a very positive surprise are the donations we received enabling us to reach even higher. We want to express our gratitude again to Contrast Film, the director Urs Frey, and the institutional and private donors who made the documentary possible.

Special Feature
Chaveewan Kwansuk (Nickname: Meow)
- Programmes & Projects

I was working for a business in Bangkok since I graduated. 14 years later I decided to move back to Chiang Mai. I was looking for a new job which was not about business anymore, without competition to make margins, to find more customers or to please them. Child’s Dream opened this new opportunity to me in April 2009. And it was a big opportunity for me at that time. Though I start working in administrative part and inside my mind I felt that I hate accounting, but I have to do it. Once I started working accounting here, it is not as complicated or difficult as I thought. Working with admin team was so exciting as they are enthusiasm people as I am. After 2 years, I have another chance to work with project team for migrant education and this challenge me to travel and work in different task such as involved for construction work, volunteer program or travel along to Laos, northern Thailand with other teams to learn more about our work. Our relax time is workshop twice a year and it’s time to summarize things we did in the past and fill our energy with fun things and with our colleagues. Every day for my working here, not any day that I think that ‘oh no today is Monday and I don’t want to go to work’. This is a place that I feel so happy, so fulfill, energize myself, help other people, feel like I have another small family with different type of people live together from 8 am to 5 pm or when you travel together with team. It’s full of fun and energy every time when you come back from field trip. Every day is never the same either, we face problem, good or bad but we just move on together and I still believe that ‘we can do everything’.

- Meow -
DID YOU KNOW?
— The Headache of Burmese Identities...

Many of you may not know that part of higher education work includes Burmese name counselling: yes, the counselling of what name - or more appropriately, identity - to use.

Firstly, we find that students often have different spellings of their name on different official documents such as their house registrations, their national ID cards and their high school diplomas. This is often due to careless mistakes by the clerks, but also due to the ‘Burmanisation’ of names, the process by which names of ethnic minority students are written in a new way in order to conform to standards in the Burmese language.

Secondly, students who leave Myanmar and come to the refugee camps for education or to obtain other education in Thailand often use an alias or nicknames instead of their official names. They do this since if they are found to have left Myanmar for this reason, their friends and family, and they themselves, if they return, can be interrogated, forced to pay bribes, or even arrested by Myanmar authorities. So in order to protect themselves and the ones they love, they often change their names completely.

Thirdly, for a variety of reasons, dates of birth for all of these identities do not match either. In Myanmar, the place of birth is often the home or village, but there is no hospital in that location. Rather than make a special trip to the hospital to register the birth of the child, the family usually waits until the trip is needed for another reason and then registers the birth at that time. However, the problem is that parents often forget the date the baby was born and just make up a new date or the clerk may write the date when the parents registered the birth instead of the actual birth date. Later in life, when students go to Thailand for education, they not only create an alias, but also an alias birth date.

The reason why this complexity is necessary to understand is that when it comes time to get a passport and apply for an official exam or university, the student must choose only one identity to use going forward since all of the new certificates will be issued in that name, including English proficiency exams and university diplomas. Although informal schools and training organisations do not require such strict data, universities and passport offices are not as flexible. For instance, the student identity used to apply to university must be the same identity that has passed the English proficiency exam and the same identity as the passport. Otherwise, it appears to the university that the documents do not match and are not referring to the same person. Another consequence of choosing an identity is that, by doing so, some certificates will no longer match, presenting problems for applying to jobs since the CV will not match all certificates. So we can clearly see that the politics of a developing country, which is frequently in armed conflict, can unnecessarily complicate some simple processes that in developed or more organised countries, we often take completely for granted.
Save the Date!

Child’s Dream will celebrate its 10th anniversary on 22 October 2013. In our calendar we have marked 1 and 2 November 2013 for an official celebration. We are about to make plans for this event. Mark the date – details are to follow!

We’re almost 10!

Our 2012 Yearbook is ready!

Follow us through our 2012 working year in an entertaining way! In many long hours of writing we have summarized 2012 for you and our graphic design volunteer Dominique packed these texts into a stunning layout. Enjoy: http://childsdream.org/fileadmin/uploads/general/Yearbook_2012_eng_final_small.pdf

Why our work in Cambodia is so essential and … some personal insights

Cord Keller, an American journalist, recently travelled with Yem and our Cambodian team in the field. Cord wrote an excellent article about Cambodia’s dramatic past and also a very personal story about Yem. We want to share this with you. The article is posted in the “media” section on our website - http://childsdream.org/fileadmin/uploads/general/Cord_Keller_Khmer_Rouge_Country_1112.pdf. Cord will try to have it published in American newspapers and/or magazines.

Donated Laptops

The Zurich Stock Exchange – SIX Swiss Exchange - was so kind to donate many 2nd hand laptops, that are still in good working condition, to us for the third time already. A big thank you to everybody involved who helped us to receive this donation. If you are traveling to Chiang Mai and have a free hand to take along such a laptop from Zurich, kindly contact Manuela (manuela@childsdream.org).

DID YOU KNOW?

All non-Thai citizens who work for Child’s Dream in Chiang Mai are legally considered “volunteers”. Even Marc, the foundation president, is a “volunteer” and needs to sign hundreds of legally binding documents for the foundation on a weekly basis. Also, foreigners need to renew their visas yearly with Thai Immigration. This process takes at least three months lead time and six administrative steps. Step number five is personally handing in the individual’s application to the immigration office. The application has 86 pages and requires submission in two copies (so, 172 pages for each of us) plus any single or multiple entry visa applications (additional 5 pages) that are needed. Almost every page must be personally signed by either the visa applicant or the foundation’s president, which adds up to about 160 personally signed pages each time. Start counting: with 10 foreigners in Child’s Dream that adds up to 1,600 A4 pages each year. Are you wondering where all this paper ends up? Don’t ask. Patience is a dearly needed virtue here!

Connect with us!

Your Child’s Dream Team

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