

Why Child's Dream works

by Dheera Sujan

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Two young Swiss bankers set up [Child's Dream](#), an organisation that tries to help underprivileged children in the Mekong region. Based in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, it's primarily geared to helping communities and refugee camps build schools as well as fund scholarships and vocational training.

The group's founders draw on their extensive contacts from their previous incarnations - they have a handy rolodex of companies and wealthy individuals who they have persuaded to dig deep into already deep pockets to help some of the most underprivileged people in the region.



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Child's Dream works by probing into remote areas on the Thai-Burma border, Laos and Cambodia, to locate communities that are living the most bare bones existence. They then approach the community and ask what they need to help their children.

They also ask the community to participate in the building of schools or centres by providing labour and perhaps some materials, and Child's Dream provides the rest. Then, when the project is finished, the structure is handed to the community to maintain, own and run. "We work from the bottom up, not the other way around," says Sallo Polak, a Dutch volunteer with Child's Dream. "We work very closely with the communities themselves."

Backpack medics

And Child's Dream also coordinates a malaria programme. On the Thai-Burma border, malaria claimed many young lives, but Child's Dream is providing impregnated nets and medicines via 'backpack medics', people who literally carry medical supplies in backpacks and walk to the most remote outposts in the jungle areas.

There is so little education about the disease in these distant areas that some villagers think that eating papayas cause malaria, as the rainy season sees both a proliferation of the fruit and the disease carrying mosquitoes. The medics raise awareness about how malaria is transmitted, stressing the importance of prevention by providing nets, repellents and advice on how to avoid contact with mosquitoes.

Child's Dream prides itself on its low overheads - fewer than four percent of their total costs. They try not to emulate the larger NGO's where money leaks into all sorts of other areas besides the target groups they're supposed to help. The two main founders of Child's Dream are unpaid, as are many of their core staff, their office headquarters remains without air-conditioning, and they are determined that the bulk of their funds will be spent on fulfilling the aims inherent in their name.

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