

# How Do We Reach Happiness?

Marc Jenni and Daniel Siegfried

E-mail: info@childsdream.org; Website: www.childsdream.org

If we had to name one thing we learned from our extensive work experience with the largest Swiss private bank, we would have to say it was that money not only didn't make us happy, but also that it distorted our sense of reality.

The higher up in the Maslow "needs pyramid" we are, the more "abstract" our problems become. Instead of worrying about basic human needs, we now worry about "self-fulfilment". It's no wonder that depression is so common in the high-income class. Isn't it ironic that it somehow makes us feel better if we listen to someone else's problems, because maybe our own problems might feel much smaller all of a sudden.

On the other hand, we can see how the tighter performance measurements and the more aggressive performance-related compensation plans for senior managers have increased the pressure on all members of the corporate world.

Sometimes we search for happiness and to make up for all the stress and pressures by going shopping. However, it is a fake source of happiness. After our handbag or watch collection takes up a whole closet or drawer, we realise that maybe something else is missing.

Even in ever-smiling Thailand — where we have lived since we resigned from our banking jobs in order to do charity work — the same problem is apparent: just the other day, we read an article in the *Bangkok Post* that stated the number of people living in poverty had declined from 15.9 million in 1999 to 9.8 million in 2002. (Of course, that's great news!) Unfortunately, the price of Thailand's economic success is now also reflected in the number of depression cases, which doubled during the same period.

## THE JOY OF GIVING

Luckily, at the same time, another trend becomes visible. We have discovered a tendency whereby people have started to take up their

responsibilities towards society and have discovered the joy of giving — depending on their capacity, appetite, and ability. High-net-worth individuals are demanding more guidance with regards to estate planning, as they wish to pass on their wealth to charities. Senior managers are resigning to take on new challenges in less well-paid (but maybe intrinsically more rewarding) charitable positions. Housewives are finding new fulfilment by volunteering for charitable causes. Families are deciding to no longer exchange holiday presents with each other, but rather to donate the money saved to a charitable cause.

And, rather than just wiring the money to the charitable organisation, people are taking on a more active role by visiting the projects they are supporting. This not only allows the donors to have a higher assurance about how the money is spent, but also will help them to put the world into a different perspective. And on top of that, it makes everybody feel happier and more fulfilled.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE "GOLDEN TRIANGLE"

Some months ago, we decided for exactly these reasons to quit our highly paid banking jobs in order to set up our own charity organisation called "Child's Dream", incorporated in Switzerland. Stepping out of the ordinary and giving up the carefully knitted "safety net" wasn't an easy task — but it turned out to be a highly rewarding one. It's amazing to realise how much one can get back by "giving" first! Often it only takes a little, including in monetary terms, to achieve great and wonderful results.

In July 2003, we moved to Chiang Mai, which serves as our base in our quest to help the less fortunate in our society, especially children in and around the "Golden Triangle".

This area combines not only the cultural heritages of Thailand, Burma, Laos, and China, but also each

country's individual problems — thus creating a humanitarian "super-crisis". The "Golden Triangle" is a poisonous underground marketplace, where two of the least-developed countries (Burma and Laos) meet two of the most booming economies in the world, China and Thailand, and their business partners of the West. In addition to the continuously increasing wealth gap, the omnipresent corruption fuels this sickening trade with drugs, humans, and anything that money can buy. Wherever a humanitarian crisis arises, children are affected the worst. With their parents either dead, in prison for drug trafficking, or in prostitution, these children don't know where to go and are extremely vulnerable to exploitation.

There are numerous projects providing a safe haven for children along the border. However, we realised that charitable funds are spread unevenly among various projects, often resulting in an inefficient use of funds.

With "Child's Dream", we aim to help to improve this situation by selectively supporting projects that are in dire need of help. In order to ensure an optimal use of funds, we provide infrastructure directly to the projects concerned, rather than giving money to cover running costs, and we supervise the construction of these projects on site.

"Child's Dream" has been tax-exempted by the Swiss tax authorities. Everybody involved in "Child's Dream" works on a voluntary basis, and no salaries are paid.

## DO YOU WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

We would be very happy to inform you about our work and how we have been able to make a difference up to now. If you are interested in helping us, take a look at our website or at the enclosed leaflet to find out the different options. Or just get in touch with us — we would be delighted to hear from you.