

Higher Education: Child's Dream

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Child's Dream was established in 2003 as a charity organization dedicated to empowering children, youth and communities in the Mekong Sub-Region. This region is at the core of many humanitarian crises, and children are suffering the most.



Meet Marc Jenni, a former Swiss UBS banker who decided to leave behind a successful career in finance in search of meaning and purpose. After 19 years in the corporate world, he and fellow Swiss banker Daniel Siegfried traded in their first-class lifestyles in order to break free from their gilded cages, journeying to Thailand, where they hoped to rediscover their creativity and happiness.

Backpacking around Southeast Asia and immersing themselves in the local communities, Marc's cultural curiosity and Daniel's humanitarian spirit ignited and Child's Dream was born. With a vision of bringing educational equity to the children of the Mekong Sub-Region, this nonprofit organization is devoted to providing opportunities to kids with limited options.

With zero experience in non-profit management, Marc hung up his suit and tie and took the jump into the unknown, confident that his passion and dedication would provide enough fuel to bring Child's Dream to life. Ten years later, he is creating sustainable change through a bottom-up approach, working in solidarity with these marginalized communities.

Marc's vision is to give each and every child a proper education, equipping them with the necessary tools to avoid exploitation, generate incomes and change their communities with tolerance and peace at the forefront. Child's Dream supports educational projects in Cambodia, Laos, Burma and Thailand with an innovative linear model. Marc analyzes each country's unique situation and identifies the major obstacles for children. Instead of just giving a basic primary

education, Marc has realized the need for a more structured pathway leading to success. This is why Child's Dream focuses on three major groups: health, basic education and higher education including vocational skills.

In regards to health, Child's Dream has helped reduce childhood mortality with malaria prevention/treatment programs, vaccinations, health care and life-saving operations. With healthy children able to attend school, Child's Dream has built over 100 schools for more than 30,000 children, constructed dozens of boarding houses and provided more than 100,000 teachers/students with school supplies. As for higher education, 125 students are currently studying at universities in Thailand, Laos and Hong Kong and over 800 students are studying in Child's Dream's 13 colleges in seven refugee camps. Other students are prepping for international high school accreditation, gaining soft skills training or participating in internships.

Living and working in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Marc and his co-founder Daniel have created a family of 30 Child's Dream staff members and have a new place to call home. Utilizing his business experience and banking network, Marc is bridging the gap between his two worlds and inspiring others to make a change. Courtesy of his passport, Marc has taken his education higher by reevaluating the metrics of success and wealth, opting for increased social impact and fulfillment over monetary gain. Here is the who, what, where, when, why and how of Marc's journey.

Q. *Who inspires you?*

A. "Daniel [co-founder of Child's Dream] still inspires me a lot... Daniel was promoted as a director [at UBS], first level of senior management, when he was 24, one of the youngest in the world. For Daniel, this triggered the decision to leave. 'I'm 24, I have reached a goal most people don't reach... where do I go from here? I'm at the top, but for what?' He accepted it and then quit two weeks later... He is a total dreamer with a very clear vision of what he wants to do. He develops ideas and dreams, and I'm the guy that makes sure everything is possible and manageable.

[Aung San Suu Kyi](#) [Burma's pro-democracy leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner]. This is a person who inspires me less from what she is really doing -- what she is doing is just trying to bring democracy, everyone can do this -- but her strength to keep on going. This is what inspires me. Where does she get this strength and power to never give up? And the most important [sources of inspiration] are my parents. They instilled a value set in us, and this is the result. If you want to achieve something, work for it. Don't wait for a miracle. We learned to bite if you want something; bite into it and don't let go until you have achieved it."

Q. *What is your vision for a better world?*

A. "I don't have vision for a better world, because I do not believe in a better world. I do not believe that the human race is ever going to change. The majority of human beings have a sense of succeeding or greed or selfishness, which nobody will or can change.

I think we are totally stuck in our current value system. Sometimes I think the financial crisis that is taking place is positive. I think it is good that people realize again that trees aren't growing into the sky. Decency. Stepping back and slowing down. Not everything has to grow all the time.

My vision is not for a better world, but I have a vision -- within that very little environment that I am able to influence -- to bring about sustainable change in that very small part of the world. This is what keeps me going. I see that we can change. By bringing education to these kids, you can improve job chances, average incomes and the social fabric in a village.

If you keep the people uneducated, you can control them... Always through education you can change this. The people wake up. It's more difficult to influence people who have a mind. We want to prepare young people to have a proper opinion -- having their own opinion without swallowing whatever is put down their throats.

I think for the time I'm here, it's something which really fulfills me, helping that small nucleus world."

Q. *Where do you find happiness?*

A. "I find happiness in my daily job. When I look at the Maslow pyramid, I'm in the top for self-fulfillment. When I think back to the bank, my happy days and unhappy days were 50 percent; this is not enough. We should have more good days than bad days.

What was missing was a big, deep pot of happiness that was not filled. You need something that kicks you every morning out of bed. Some get it from drugs; I get it from coffee and my job... I get up easily, I am surrounded by extremely good people, and everyone amazes me and inspires me. Each and everyone has a personal motivation to do what they are doing. This makes me happy in my daily life.

Once you are sucked into the system of this corporate world, you start to not recognize that there is something around it. You forget about it more and more.

You don't feel that something is missing. This big piece is happiness. If you feel sad, you go to the shopping mall and buy another expensive watch or car. That keeps you going for a week. With every consumer good you buy, the shelf life becomes shorter and shorter. Either you keep consuming, or you have to look for something more sustainable. And finding happiness has nothing to do with money."

Q. *When do your creative juices serge?*

A. "At the beginning when we came out of the bank, we had this tunnel vision like in horses. Working in a 60,000-employee corporation, they aren't looking for people who create or who are different, they are looking for people who behave and fit in. This is why you develop this tunnel vision. For me, it took about four-six months until creativity came back.

Now, I develop ideas every morning in the swimming pool. Maybe after 10 minutes, I get into a state of meditation; I don't feel like I'm swimming. This is the moment where my brain starts to connect dots and ideas come up.

Another one is two or three glasses of wine. Daniel had the idea of setting up a charity, but the idea evolved over many bottles of wine. It brings out the dreamer."

Q. *Why Child's Dream?*

A. "I was not drawn because of philanthropic reasons. I was not drawn by what we do now; I was pushed out by what I did before. I had a push factor not a pull factor... a real urge to get out of my old life.

Stumbling over Child's Dream was pure coincidence. I sat with Daniel and he had the idea of coming up with an NGO, but I said he is totally nuts. What triggered me was the business aspect. The philanthropy evolved.

Daniel volunteered first at an orphanage. He wasn't a financial giver; he was interested in getting his hands dirty. For me, it was buy yourself free with money, but don't engage too much because I felt it was a bag of problems... I didn't want it to come close to me because I felt this was a sad industry. But it is the opposite; these children are just as happy!

I got this opportunity to see and was immediately caught up. I remember the first project we went to at a shelter with 110 kids. There was this giggling experience and I was drawn into it quickly and developed a passion for it.

In just a short moment you play with kids and trigger that giggle in kids, where they can't stand up, they have tears... 100 percent pure energy. When you hear this, you have to feel good. It's such an amazing, strong energy kids can give you through their smile. In kids, it comes out so natural and is extremely powerful. This is an extremely important source of happiness. I think only kids can do this."

Q. *How has traveling changed your life?*

A. "I was really fascinated by Southeast Asia. We always traveled with a backpack and stayed in guesthouses; we wanted to get close to people and experience real life... This gave us an interest in what was happening in this area: how do communities live, what are the children doing? We stayed in villages and did hiking.

This was a very nice contrast to the heavy traveling you did in the bank. This was a totally different kind of travel; this was business and first class. I found traveling around [for the bank] highly depressive. You are always alone. You board the plane. You feel totally lonely. You go to your cab. You go to a five-star hotel. I got mood swings everytime I came back. What am I doing with my life?

This is the whole traveling story and the push factor out of the financial industry. For Daniel, it was an easy step. I was more brainwashed and more afraid to lose it; not being able to sustain your lifestyle.

We know so many frustrated bankers, having midlife crises, being totally unhappy with their lives, but always being guided by these excuses as to why they can't change their lives -- I have kids. I just bought a house. I just got a dog. My child got into a new school...

Jump out of the window: everyone can fly... It doesn't have to be philanthropy, but really try something... You will never see what's on the other side of the line if you don't overstep.

Even if you are very young, you can make it and stop it and start again without much money. What can go wrong? You can go back. Just try something. You will discover; you will develop so many ideas and will meet new people, inspiring people who can give you ideas.

If you put in passion to what you do, you can always succeed. You can never learn passion, but you can always learn what you need."

For more information, please visit: [Child's Dream](#)