



# Child's Dream

A charity organization supporting children in need

[www.childsdream.org](http://www.childsdream.org)



## Our objectives

- To stop migration of children from their origin
- To prevent child labor, trafficking and sexual exploitation
- To cultivate a better attitude towards life and society
- To help children to take pride in themselves and strengthen their self-esteem
- To improve living conditions
- To encourage the children to love and respect their own customs and culture
- To raise awareness among families and communities of child trafficking

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## Newsletter

September 2004

### Child's Dream is expanding its reach

Child's Dream is growing and so should our area of coverage. During a recent trip to the Cambodian border and the shocking realisation of the problems of this distressed area, we decided not to limit our help to the 'Golden Triangle', but extend our scope to an area known as the 'Mekong Sub-Region', which includes Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. As these countries are linked together through cross-border activities, especially trafficking of children and women, we can leverage on the experience gained in the 'Golden Triangle'. This new area will allow us not only to even better allocate our resources where they are most needed, but also to fight the migration and exploitation of children at the source.

### Organizational Update

In order to improve our website and, therefore, our communication with you, we decided to change our web host. After asking a couple of companies in Switzerland for free hosting services, we found [www.genotec.ch](http://www.genotec.ch), which not only allows us to use their server for free, but also provides free support.

### Project-Search Trip

With the first batch of projects completed, we took the advantage of the rainy reason, during which no construction can commence, and went on an extensive project-search trip to locate new potential projects along the Cambodian and Burmese border. Against all discouragement from our friends and even our mechanic, we decided to try our luck by undertaking the 2500km journey with 'Nok', our trusted 70ies VW minivan.

Our first destination was the infamous border checkpoint connecting the towns of Aranyaprathet (Thailand) and Poipet (Cambodia). Unlike some other border areas, here the dilemma is clearly evident, instantly filling us with sadness, replacing our happiness with eagerness and strength to help. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of unprotected street children and child workers were streaming to-

wards us making their way unchecked into Thailand, which is part of their daily routine in the struggle to survive. Once we had crossed the border, we were greeted by huge 5-star casino resorts catering for ultra-rich Thai customers, often officials, we were told. Nowhere on this planet had we experienced such a gap between rich and poor, adding disgust to our moods. We met four organizations caring for children in this area to learn more about the complex factors leading to this humanitarian crisis. Children with or without families migrate to the Poipet area from their home towns in the countryside. They are attracted by the hope of making money like flies by the deadly blue light of a fly trap. Once in Poipet, the risk of exploitation is enormous. Organized trafficking gangs sell girls and young women into prostitution and boys into begging rings, both bound for Bangkok. In addition, many children are working in the border markets and are therefore unable to attend school. We established a particular good relationship with a Swiss organization called Goutte d'Eau, which runs a couple of programs caring for about 500 children. Together, we are exploring opportunities about how Child's Dream could possibly engage and provide relief to this hot-spot.



Kids at the Goutte d'Eau shelter in Poipet

### Did you know that...

*most street children in Bangkok are originally from Cambodia?!*



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Back in Bangkok, we met a couple of big NGOs (Non-government organization) to further strengthen our network and make them aware of our concept and goals. After a short break and on the way back north, we stopped in another border town in the Tak province called Mae Sot, which bridges Thailand with the Karenni State in Burma. With the ongoing clashes between the Burmese military junta and the Karen army called Karen National Union (KNU), there is a constant flow of illegal migrant people seeking refuge in Thailand and particularly in the Tak province. These people, mostly Karen, have no rights whatsoever and are therefore abused for dangerous and low-paid work such road construction, work on plantations or garment factories. With a daily salary of less than USD 2, the most basic needs can often not be met. Many children are malnourished and unable to go to school. Sanitation and hygiene standards in the villages are extremely poor. After

talking to numerous local and international organizations, we realized soon that our concept of providing infrastructure may be difficult to apply in Mae Sot. The huge uncertainty about the



Tai visiting a school near Mae Sot

future of these migrant people, obviously depending on Thailand's policy towards Burma and its migrant people on Thai soil, makes it risky, but not impossible, to invest in long-lasting and expensive infrastructure. We are currently evaluating the risks and opportunities of two smaller and one bigger project in Mae Sot. We hope to share with you more details about these projects once we are confident of their feasibility.

### Wan Pieang Fha School Complex

It is estimated that over 150,000 Shan refugees are now taking shelter in Thailand, who have fled forced relocation and other human rights abuses committed by the Burmese military in the Shan State. They continue to be denied refugee status by the Thai authorities and must survive as illegal migrant workers. This means great hardship for these refugees, who have no legal protection and find it difficult to fulfill their basic food and health needs. Most of the children have no access to education. One area which



has been particularly affected is the Murg Karn valley, opposite northern Chiang Rai province, where a de facto refugee camp called Piang Fha provides shelter to over 2000 refugees.

It was on a grey and rainy September day, very particular for this time of the year, when Marc and Tai visited Piang Fha village and looked once again behind the touristy façade of the Chiang Rai province. The steep, winding road passes the attractions of Doi Tung Mountain, where tourists admire the beautiful landscape without having a clue of the tragedy laying in these misty mountains. Just about one hour later on motorbikes with drivers and their faces purposely hidden under the helmet, Tai and Marc passed less innocent people. The Thai army is heavily patrolling this green border line and does not really welcome visitors with open arms. While infiltrating deeper towards the Burmese border, another group of armed people, the Shan army, showed interest in their presence. However, after explaining the purpose of the visit, they were free to go. Upon their safe arrival at the village, a meeting with the principal, teachers and the architect was called. The problems were laid out in great details.

Because of the large number of children, the camp committee started running a nursery school with 85 children and four teachers and a primary school with 295 children and nine teachers. Unfortunately, due



Primary school in Wan Pieang Fha

to a lack of funding, the school buildings are in extremely poor condition and no longer provide a safe and comfortable learning environment. The bamboo roofs are dotted with leaks and started to rot due to the constant rain. Furthermore, the soaked soil serving as class room floors provide a damp, unhealthy atmosphere.

After careful consideration, Child's Dream decided to support the Wan Pieang Fha village by building a new school complex with three buildings totaling 392m<sup>2</sup>, a canteen (108m<sup>2</sup>) as well as the sanitation houses with five toilets each.

In the same area, we will also construct an orphanage (96m<sup>2</sup>) for 13 girls with a separate toilet house. The projected budget amounts to THB 1,161,464 or USD 29,000. It is expected that these constructions will be completed by December this year.



Sketch of the main school building



Sketch of the orphanage



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By improving hygiene and education standards for the over 300 children in Wan Pieang Fha village, Child's Dream aims to indirectly prevent exploitation of these children through helping them to take pride in themselves and restoring their dignity.

SWAN (Shan Women Action Network), which takes care of over 1,100 children in 11 schools along the Thai – Burmese border, will be responsible for the management of this new school complex including providing the running costs.



The land has already been prepared

### Vocational Training Center

When children turn into teenagers and their fundamental education is finished, they are likely to drop out of their project shelter, but are too young and missing the skill-set needed to become independent and make a living on their own. This Vocational Training Center (VTC) in Mae Sai is tailored to bridge exactly this gap between childhood and adulthood. Besides offering English and Computer classes, VTC has started to conduct a mechanic workshop. The carpenter and baker workshops will follow suit soon.

In early August Child's Dream went on a shopping spree, which completely overstretched not only our Thai skills, but also our German and English vocabulary. Well, we ended up drawing most of the tools to the amusement of the staff in the shop. We bought high-quality tools and equipment necessary for the carpenter and mechanic workshop ranging from various types of saws and drills to air compressor and welder transformer.

Unfortunately, during a recent visit to Mae Sai, we realized that the implementation of the mechanic workshop was not successful. The language barrier between the German expert and the local teenagers could not be overcome, leaving all people involved frustrated and wanting to surrender. We immediately contacted the person in charge to set a deadline for correcting the situation. Otherwise, we will exercise our right stipulated in our memorandum of understanding and remove all the tools and equipment bought by Child's Dream worth USD 2,800. We withdrew from all our future commitments. We are already in talks with credible organizations, which are interested in launching a vocational training center and could use our brand-new tools. We will keep you posted on these developments.

### Project Round-up

**School in Yabauyaya village** – Daily informal school activities with over 40 children have started and are organized by staff from Childlife and Worldvision.

**School in Tomato village** – More than 80 children take advantage of this English-learning facility. We bought additional teaching materials such as books, cassettes and games. An assistant teacher will be hired to help Benjamin, as he currently teaches two classes simultaneously.

**OPC** – Under the leadership of Khun Kham Chuen, the project moved to the new site, where about 20 children and 9 teenagers receive education. In addition, 5 girls and 4 boys stay permanently at the new shelter. The number of children is expected to grow to about 40 over time.

#### Did you know that...

life expectancy of the people of Chiang Mai has been reduced from 68 to 63 years over the last five years due to AIDS?!

### How you can help

Besides making a monetary contribution, we also look for less-conventional ways to help us in our quest.

If you keep up with the latest technology trends, you must have a couple of old mobile phones with their moment of gadget-glory long passed. Instead of sending them to IT-heaven, where they can join all the other B&W-displayed, not-so-mobile, too-big-to-fit-into-super-tight-jeans and having-only-20-different-ringtones mobile phones, they could still serve a really worthy cause here in Thailand. No matter how 'uncool' they are, they will help us to keep in touch with the different project leaders. Give your old hand phones a second life and send them together with their adaptors to our office in Chiang Mai.

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*"Children must never be used for political purposes, and schools must never be degraded to places of violence. They must be preserved as safe havens for children to learn and play. If we don't respect the sanctity of childhood, then we have nothing."*

UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy condemning the hostage-taking in Beslan, Russia

We hope you have enjoyed this snapshot of our work and look forward to hearing from you.

Cheers,



Marc Tai Daniel