



# Child's Dream

A charity organization supporting children in need

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



## Our objectives

- To stop migration of Burmese children from their origin
- To prevent child labour, 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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## Field Trip to Mae Hong Son (14 – 16 December 2003)

A couple of weeks ago, we were listening with a keen interest and a growing excitement to Karl Foerster, a good German friend from 'Hope for Life', while watching a video footage about a children project in Mae Hong Son. This took place in our favourite lunch eatery, which serves excellent 'khaosoi gap gai' (curry egg noodles with chicken) and 'muu sate' (pork sate) for only USD 1. Given Karl's expression and unusual seriousness, we knew that the project he was referring to meant a lot to him.

On 14 December, a sunny and cold Sunday morning, we boarded a short-haul 50-seat propeller plane for a 35 minutes flight. Mae Hong Son is surrounded by mountains and punctuated by small but picturesque lakes. This provincial capital is still relatively peaceful with a population of less than 8000. We were welcomed by Khun Kham Chuen, the manager of OPC (Opportunity for Poor Children). After he escorted us to our guesthouse, he brought us to the site of the OPC school. The school lies at the entrance of a beautiful valley, full of palm trees and rice paddies, just outside Mae Hong Son. It can be reached via a small path through rice paddies and a bridge over a small creek, which carries water even during the current dry season.



*OPC's unfinished school*

## OPC (Opportunity for Poor Children)

In a small, unfinished (no windows and doors) single storey house, OPC is providing basic education for about 30 children. They all

share the same burden of originating from ethnical minorities in Burma. Therefore, these children, aged between 4 and 12 years, have no rights whatsoever. About half of the children have lost their parents, while others have fathers in prison, convicted for drug trafficking. On the other hand, many mothers vanished



*Lunch with OPC children*

into prostitution. The children who still have parents and live close by, are coming to the OPC School everyday. Their parents don't dare sending the children to the official government school. We realized very soon that the members of OPC as well as the parents of the children try not to be exposed to any government institution. They are at the mercy of the local Thai government. Every move is a balancing act between helping themselves raising awareness about their situation and not getting caught for it by the government. We admire their courage and spirit.

Child's Dream is interested in building a shelter providing accommodation as well as space for vocational training. We aim to realise this by next spring. Khun Kham Chuen would like to teach the children how to produce Soya milk and how to make bread. Currently, some teenagers from OPC learn these skills in Mae Hong Son as part of an apprenticeship.



*OPC's kitchen*

## Mae Aw village

Yet another sunny but bitter cold day greeted us the next morning. It has not been raining for the last three months. We made our way towards the Burmese border by motorbikes. We soon realized the reason for being told to hire two motorbikes. The road became almost impassably steep and even the lowest gear of our Honda Dreams 100ccm seemed not to be able to produce the power needed. After countless sharp turns, we reached a small picturesque Chinese minority village only a couple of hundred meters from the border. Once famous for its drug smuggling business, the village now grows tea which is sold in Mae Hong Son as well as to the Burmese border patrol. As we were told that the village receives financial support from Taiwan, there was not much to do for us except for tasting the tea and practicing our Mandarin language skills. Luckily, the villagers speak a strong dialect, which spared us from complete embarrassment.



## Tomato village

Further south along the border, we reached the 'tomato village' where many ethnical groups from this region live in close harmony. There is a 'wat' (Buddhist temple) and a catholic church and people are free to worship where they feel most comfortable. We were told that some of these families have left the refugee camps, as they prefer to try to make their living on their own instead of depending on the UN or the ICRC to care for them. After parking our motorbikes along the steep main road and climbing up a couple of stairs, we were greeted by Benjamin in fluent English.



*Future location of the proposed school*

He left Burma shortly after the Burmese military took over the control of the country in the 60ies and has been living in Thailand ever since. He is teaching English to a couple of children from the village, but attendance depends on whether the parents can afford the 10 Baht fee (USD 0.25) for a two hours lesson. To make a living and to care for his own family, Benjamin is forced to charge the 10 Baht since this is his major source of income. Sometimes he guides western tourists to the nearby border but this is becoming increasingly difficult

and dangerous. Since it is very hard for him to turn down some of the poorer children, he approached OPC for help. His own little home currently serves as the only place to teach and can only accommodate a handful of students. Since the demand for learning English is big and steadily growing, he would need a new hut. Pointing at a small piece of land behind his bamboo hut overlooking the village, he mentioned that he would build a school there if he would have the financial backing. Not only the children of the village want to study English, but also their parents realised that this is a way out of their misery. We agree with Benjamin that English is not only important to find a job but also to become respected by the Thai nationals. Benjamin himself is re-

spected in the area and also managed to get non-Thai national teenagers into high school in Mae Hong Son. We would like to support OPC and Benjamin in their quest to raise the educational level among children from ethnical minorities. Building a small hut, which serves as a school and library would be a step worth taking.



*Best friends Kham Chuen (left) and Benjamin (right)*

Before we returned back to Mae Hong Son, we all enjoyed a wonderful lunch and some excellent home-grown coffee in the only guesthouse in a radius of 40 kilometers, situated a few kilometers away from the Burmese border.

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