



August Newsletter 2021



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FROM THE FOUNDERS

By Marc Thomas Jenni

Co-Founder &
Managing Director Operations

Mounting Challenges - What Keeps Us Going?

YOU – ALL of YOU

Today's challenges are of a magnitude which, more often than not, make us feel helpless, frustrated, angry and wondering how to deal with all of this. Sleepless nights are more frequent than ever since our beginnings in 2003 and the weight on our shoulders is steadily growing. Luckily, we have so many outstanding team members who carry that weight together with us and who act as an anchor of hope and motivation during these times. Having such a dedicated team in the

region makes all the difference and makes the situation more bearable. At the beginning of 2021, we were hopeful that the worst was over and that COVID-19 could be brought under control in our four countries, leading to more 'normality' again. How wrong we were! South East Asia is currently experiencing the worst outbreak of the virus since spring 2020. What looked like a very successful management of the pandemic last year, has turned into a catalyst of poverty. Even in comparably 'wealthy' Thailand, more than five million people slipped below the poverty line by July. You can all just imagine what happened in Lao PDR, Cambodia and Myanmar, already, before the pandemic, ranked as the poorest countries in the Asia Pacific. The wheel of poverty eradication is spinning backwards faster and faster.

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Myanmar's generals, who took over power in February 2021, are further tightening their grip, becoming more brutal day by day, leaving hundreds of thousands of Burmese civilians in a state of peril. A growing number of the population is today considered 'internally displaced', de facto becoming refugees in their own country. Even the UN fears a famine and the rapid spread of COVID-19 creates 'The Perfect Storm'. Myanmar, having the second worst healthcare system in the world, is very badly equipped to deal with a war situation and a global pandemic. Health experts inside the country warn that the number of COVID-19

casualties could reach unthinkable levels, bringing avoidable death to far too many. The little vaccine available and the urgently needed oxygen are used as a weapon of war by the junta against its very own people.

So what keeps us going under these miserable conditions?

YOU – ALL of YOU and the positive impact that we can make TOGETHER for the people that need our help more than ever before.

Over the last couple of months, we have witnessed an unprecedented level of compassion from all our donors, supporters and friends. Our initial worries that the current state of the world would lead to steep drops in donations, hence painful cuts in beneficiaries' support, luckily did not happen. Many of you even stepped up support and helped us to fund our Myanmar Emergency Relief Operations with USD 1.5 million. Many thanks! All of you enable us to not only keep on following our mandate, but additionally, to help us to soften the traumatic impact of this devastating humanitarian crisis. We truly hope to be able to continue receiving your support. Please do not forget us in the months to come.



LAO PDR

By Meghan Jones

Assistant Communication and
Marketing Manager

Computer Laboratory Programme

Child's Dream has been supporting the construction of schools in Lao PDR since 2006, and in the province of Xaignabouli (located on the northwest border of Lao PDR) since 2008. While building schools has certainly been a rewarding project, it did not take long to realise that many schools needed support beyond the construction of a school building. We noticed quickly that our secondary schools were often lacking computers and computer laboratories, leaving students underprepared when progressing in further academic and/or professional pursuits.

Despite Lao PDR being one of the poorest countries in the world, the government consistently works towards improving their educational system, including the addition of computer classes as part of the national curriculum. Computer skills have become an increasingly essential part of higher education and a necessary skill set for many careers. Unfortunately, for many remote schools in Lao PDR, students do not have access to actual computers and therefore do not gain adequate computer skills by completion of their education.

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As part of their curriculum, students learn about computers,

but only in theoretical classes using traditional lecture-style lessons, and students often never even get the chance to practise what they learn on an actual computer. Many schools simply do not have the resources necessary to provide their students with computers on which to learn.

In order to address this problem, Child's Dream started building computer laboratories in Lao PDR in 2014. We decided to focus on Xaignabouli Province, where we had already established strong relationships with many communities and supported the construction of many schools. Over the course of the next seven years, we helped to build twelve computer laboratories in Lao PDR with two more currently in construction, and supported the development of computer training curriculums. Each computer lab is equipped with approximately 30 desktop computers with internet access, a projector and AC units.

Through this initiative, students have had the opportunity to take courses at their schools in practical computing, and gain essential skills to enhance their employability. We have adapted the programme over the years to include systems to maintain the computer laboratories and ensure that schools are prepared to take on the maintenance of these important resources themselves. We plan to continue to build computer laboratories in Lao PDR, as the development of computer skills will remain an important asset for students far into the future.



CAMBODIA

By Aidan McAuliffe

Assistant Communication and
Marketing Manager

Shifting Gears and Covering More Ground in Cambodia

While our operations in Lao PDR and Myanmar may have slowed down over the past 18 months, our team in Cambodia has gone into overdrive by increasing their workload at an unprecedented rate and thus reaching more beneficiaries than ever before.

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The political crisis in Myanmar and COVID-19 travel restrictions between Thailand and Lao PDR have seriously impacted our project operations in those countries. Although the spread of COVID-19 in Cambodia since February of this year has proved unrelenting, our team there has nonetheless found ways to navigate the many obstacles that stand in their way and are on track for a record-breaking year.

So far this year, 26 school building projects in Cambodia have been given the green light, compared to 13 school buildings for the same period in 2020. Our High School Scholarship Programme has also gone up a gear and has seen a massive increase in intake. The programme currently has 390 students enrolled with a further

150 students to be offered places later this year; this represents a 66% increase compared to last year when 325 were enrolled over the entire year.

Our small team in Siem Reap has not only increased the number of children and youth benefitting from programmes, but also the number of training sessions each student directly receives from Child's Dream as part of the scholarship programme. The experience the team garnered using online tools during the onset of the pandemic in 2020 has enabled them to become more functional and to have greater reach in the process.

Mr. Yem Khlok, the Country Director Child's Dream Cambodia Organisation (CDCO), has the utmost confidence in the high-quality implementation of such projects despite the unprecedented increase in the workload. In addition to hiring two more staff members this year, he credits the existing staff members who have taken on extra responsibilities this year, supporting their teammates in different departments where needed.

We are hopeful that our projects across the entire region can return to normal in the near future, but for now, we are inspired by the hard work and dedication of our peers in Siem Reap as they go the extra mile to improve children's education in Cambodia.



THAILAND

By Daniel Marco Siegfried

Co-Founder &
Managing Director Programmes

Children's Medical Fund Adaptations During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is having many unexpected consequences. Our Children's Medical Fund (CMF) offers life-saving treatments for children with congenital diseases from Myanmar and Lao PDR. However, since the borders between Thailand, Myanmar and Lao PDR have remained closed since April 2020, our patients are stuck in their home countries and cannot access our services. Currently we have over 200 patients in Myanmar alone awaiting treatments, which are not available in their country, like heart surgeries. Some of these young patients have unfortunately already passed away.

Earlier this year we were hoping that borders would open in the first or second quarter. However, since the pandemic is currently ravaging our region, we do not expect the borders to open this year. This leaves our CMF programme underutilised, so we have decided to add two temporary interventions to address the current health needs in Thailand.

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Firstly, we agreed to accept Thai pediatric cardiac patients who could not afford the expensive special equipment for the surgery as well as the special medicines, including therapeutic milk formula for post-surgery treatment of infants. These costs are not covered by the Thai social security fund and need to be paid by the parents, who often have to go into debt. Secondly, we are offering our referral health partners in the refugee camps along the Thai – Myanmar border the opportunity of our covering the costs at local hospitals for surgery for congenital diseases like hydrocephalus, hypospadias and gastrointestinal diseases, as well as for the treatment of preterm neonate with respiratory distress. These two additional programme interventions will run until the end of this year when we review the situation. We truly hope that the borders to Lao PDR and Myanmar will open early next year so that we can finally treat our patients there.



MYANMAR

By Daniel Marco Siegfried

Co-Founder &
Managing Director Programmes

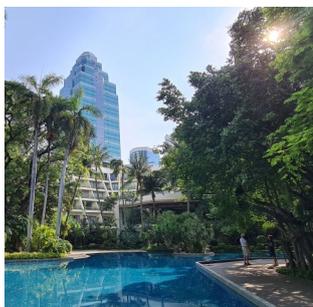
Moving Down the Maslov Pyramid

Although Child's Dream focuses on solving long-term social issues through our education and health programmes, we can also support short-term emergency relief efforts in our countries and we have done that a couple of times in the past. However, these emergencies were triggered by natural disasters such as flooding and not – like in the current situation – by an implosion of a whole country. Within a few weeks Myanmar has turned from a country full of hope in its democracy building process to a failed pariah state run by generals. The lives of millions have turned upside down and not only their livelihoods but also their hopes and dreams have been destroyed. This resulted in a huge shift in needs as the people of Myanmar are being pushed to the bottom of the Maslov Pyramid.

Hearing the horrendous stories of unprecedented suffering directly from the people affected, looking away is not an option for us. We must try to alleviate the worst suffering to the best of our abilities.

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Our first priority is to provide humanitarian relief and assistance to people that were forced to flee their homes and are now in hiding due to fighting between the army and ethnic rebel groups. There are roughly 200,000 newly internally displaced persons since the coup and together with our local partners we aim to access at least half of them to provide food, shelter and basic health supplies by the end of September. We are also in discussion with some health organisations to support their COVID-19 efforts. So far, we have earmarked USD 1.5 million for these humanitarian relief efforts. Our second priority is to maintain our existing health and education programmes, even under the most adverse circumstances. Unfortunately, some programmes had to be suspended due to security, but the majority is still going despite the countless challenges. The determination, adaptability and ingenuity of our local partners and colleagues in Myanmar combined with the international solidarity of our donors is our strength not only to help people in distress but also restore some of their hopes and dreams. Myanmar needs us now - join us!



VOLUNTEER STORIES

By Rita Feger

Office Volunteer

Eleven Nights in Bangkok

With the wish to make a positive contribution to a fairer world, one is usually not alone, so getting an internship is often difficult. Thankfully, my time had come: I had received an invitation to interview with Child's Dream. Confident that the pandemic would soon be over and my head filled with picturesque Far East images without ever having been there, I was full of anticipation. No idea how to use Zoom, but still proud that I didn't forget to put on my pants, I sat nervously in front of my laptop and waited... but the screen stayed black until further notice that the interview had to be adjourned. At least I was spared of accidentally pressing a wrong button or filter and appearing on the screen as a potato or a cat. (If I had, I would have preferred the cat over a potato of course, for at least a cat has a chance of succeeding in a job interview).

Fortunately, everything went smoothly during the second interview. A few weeks later I went to the Thai embassy with my thick stack of official papers and soon travelled to Bangkok. Like an intruder from outer space, I was met at the airport by an army of blue and white plastic people.

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In several successive stations, I had to show all the meticulously collected confirmation papers while my temperature was taken on every occasion. Assured that what I was experiencing

was not a fever dream, I was not convinced myself..

I was driven to the hotel where eleven nights and twelve days of quarantine awaited me. Upon arrival and later, again and again, I was presented with countless consent forms to sign. I still ask myself today whether I did not unwittingly sell my soul in the process.

As a potential danger to the population, segregated and cut off from the environment, I felt at times as if I were in temporary solitary confinement deprived of my freedom of movement. This is how stereotypes become relative in times of crisis, and optimally equipped hotel rooms become cages- regardless of how golden they shine.



It was all about being patient and making best use of time. The highlight of the day was food, therefore even the dinner bell alone produced an abnormal feeling of happiness. Having been tested negative for the first time, I was allowed a short daily walk in the courtyard... uh, around the hotel pool. However, several days in a fully air-conditioned room clouded even this simple pleasure and I began to grasp what it means when it's summer in Siam. Eleven nights quarantined in Bangkok makes a hard woman humble. Fortunately, everything comes to an end and I could feel Chiang Mai, an angel, sliding up to me.

Child's Dream e-Workshop 2021

Our 2021 e-workshop on July 2nd was a blast! We talked about our overall impact, organisational updates, and the COVID-19 impact on our projects. Despite being online, it sparked – with the aid of different virtual tools – some super collaborative discussion and seamless interactions with teammates. We had a great mix of activities, including presentations, fun quizzes, and games. To ensure continued success, CD identifies the best online tools to maximise our team dynamics and strengthen our interaction to bring remote teams to one place. We are so looking forward to the next workshop; be that online or in-person, we will surely make it as exciting as this one.



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