How a balance of heart and head helped Child’s Dream become a reality

Marc Jenni and Daniel Siegfried gave up careers in banking to set up a charity for children in Asia. They started from nothing and built an association that delivers health, education and – perhaps most important of all – hope.

“Good philanthropy requires perfect balance between heart and head – your heart needs to really understand and care about the people you are trying to help, and your head must stay rational and make good decisions.”

Daniel is talking about the secret to success of Child’s Dream – a charitable, not-for-profit organisation supporting children and young adults in Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. Co-founded by Marc and Daniel in 2003, the organisation now employs over 50 people. They work to reduce childhood mortality and improve health and hygiene in schools and communities, while also increasing access to quality education.

Marc and Daniel both admit that the balance is not always easy to maintain – the current situation in Myanmar in particular is “absolutely devastating”, says Daniel, “making it really difficult for me not to become emotional about it and lose that balance.” But over the last 18 years, they have managed to navigate that line, and deliver meaningful change and real hope for thousands of children.

A meaningful mission
They set up Child’s Dream after successful but unfulfilling careers in banking in Switzerland, Hong Kong and Singapore. Those experiences provided a gateway to Southeast Asia and a first realisation of some of the challenges faced by local children. For the two of them, that realisation was a pivotal moment. “Daniel basically had an epiphany that he wanted to do something meaningful, and he suggested we set up a children’s charity,” says Marc. “We sat there in a little guest house in front of a blank piece of paper, and through the night our ideas formed. We are both so happy that it developed from there into something so meaningful.”

Productive partnership
The organisation established a partnership with Roche in 2019, with three clear areas of focus in Cambodia: improving school building infrastructure, with a five-year goal of 150 new primary, secondary or high school classrooms benefiting 6,000 students a year; supporting computer laboratory facilities, with the aim of ten fully equipped computer laboratories to vastly improve IT skills and knowledge; and finally, backing 350 high school scholarships to help marginalised students improve job and social mobility opportunities.

“The partnership works because we have a shared purpose and Roche is very engaged in the work we are doing,” says Daniel. “And the impact is very real. We will provide new school buildings for thousands of children in Cambodia, some of whom are the most marginalised, with difficult backgrounds. And with computer labs comes digital literacy, which is so important to bring new opportunities.”

They emphasise that we can all make a difference. It does not have to mean travelling to the other side of the world – it can mean being “a social worker in your own network”, whether that’s your family members, your neighbours or your local community. “But try to maintain that balance between heart and head,” says Marc. “And remember, even after the biggest storm, the sun will come out and shine again.”