

NTAsset

Trip Report with Child's Dream Foundation

1st November 2013

All for a good cause

Every year, we set aside 2.5 basis points of our management fee for CSR activities, most of which goes into education for both Thai and non-Thai children. Last year, we donated to the Bangkok Post Foundation to help build a new library at Naraesuan Huay Plueng School in Hua Hin, Thailand, a school which is under the royal patronage of HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. In addition, the management company provided funds and support to Child's Dream Foundation. Child's Dream was founded in 2003 by two Swiss nationals who abandoned their high-flying banking career and founded new 'fulfilled' meanings in life by helping under-privileged children in the sub-Mekong region (Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand) for access to better health and education. To date, they have built more than 140 schools and nearly 40 boarding houses for children in these areas. You can find out more about Child's Dream on their website, www.childsdream.org.

Last month, our senior analyst, Kitti and our intern, Thomas, had the opportunity to attend the foundation's 10th year anniversary in Chiang Mai, Thailand. They had a chance to sign up for an overnight journey with a small group of donors led by Daniel Siegfried (one of the founders of Child's Dream) and Chalach "Jack" Mongkolsoemsakul (Thailand's project

manager). They made a visit to a few Thai schools (Au Tum School with over 200 students and Kuen Tuen School with around 150-160 students) under the foundation's program up in a remote mountain in Chiang Mai near the Thai-Myanmar border area. Here is Kitti's account of their unforgettable experience.

Our recent trip to Chiang Mai allowed us to experience first-hand and appreciate how significant and critical Child's Dream role is for these children and for some of the hill tribe communities found in the North of Thailand. To begin with, these schools are only accessible by foot (over 10 km walk uphill) and four-wheel-drive trucks. It took us on average 6 hours each day in a specially modified elevated-suspension four wheel drive to slither and slide through narrow, winding and steep muddy and rocky terrains to the schools. On some stretches, we felt we were in the IRT Deadliest Roads reality program! We encountered several narrow roads which bordered sheer cliff walls dropping several hundred meters. All credit went to Daniel and Jack's four by four driving skills as one wrong move could surely have been disastrous, and one of trucks nearly capsized during the journey.



We were told these areas and schools are entirely cut off during the rainy season given much of the access roads are washed away and/or under-water. Another key but obvious challenge is the government's sparse budget and funding to these schools, typically full of indigenous children in remote and poverty stricken areas. In Thailand, overall administrations below the provincial level are run by what we call Sub-district Administrative Organizations (SAO). It is these individual SAOs which have to fight for the budget allocation and one can easily imagine how difficult these SAOs for smaller and poorer areas in Thailand are to be heard to try to address their funding needs. To put that into perspective, it is impossible for children to commute to schools on daily basis with such long distances and tough terrain access, hence the only way for the children to stay in schools is to have boarding houses where the children can live and perhaps go home during weekends and school breaks. It is not difficult to see why not only the budget, but also the logistics make it difficult for these children to get an

education. Without a proper education, these children will be unable to lift themselves from their current lifestyle. Child's Dream also provides higher education opportunities for some of these school children to further their education and it is heart-warming to see one of their students, who they have supported through tertiary education, finally returned to get a job with the government in Myanmar, in a position to potentially be an 'enabler' of change for their people. Without Child's Dream, this 'dream' would not have been possible for a few of these individuals.

Amazing views up there



As we reached the summit and arrived at these schools, hours of back-breaking endurance each day was more than compensated by seeing the faces of many innocent children with curious looks on their faces, giggling at strangers visiting, a rarity. Scenic views near the school areas were simply indescribable and totally breath-taking. On the first day, we toured a new boarding house at the Au Tum School, whilst on the second day we attended a simple opening ceremony for a new school building and saw the operations for a new drinking water system donated by a donor family at Kuen Tuen School. After visiting the schools each day, we also had the opportunity to spend time walking to the nearby villages from which some of children came.

Old run-down class room



New one donated



New drinking facilities for children



New boarding house



One cannot help but be moved by the dedication and the selflessness of many people we came across during this trip. To mention a few, the principal at Kuen Tuen School came to the school some 13 years ago and has never left. He has never requested for a transfer to a less hardship post like many others did, largely because he himself came from a poor background and was neglected like his current students and he wanted to improve their lives. Jack, from Child's Dream, whose father also used to be a teacher in one of these mountain schools, has been helping Child's Dream since 2008. He felt that by helping these children, he felt more connected to his father. A Karen teacher at the school used to be a student at the school and now volunteers as a full time teacher. Every character we met had some stories to tell, and every one of them is willing to dedicate their lives to provide a better opportunity for these children.

Future



Overall, this trip was not only eye opening but was also a deeply moving experience for Thomas and myself. It warms our hearts to see that we have a part to play in not only supporting these children, but also that we, in our own way, help provide the infrastructure to help some of these selfless people achieve their dreams and goals. We have to thank Daniel

and Marc for their dedication and their vision in making a decision that not only changed their lives, but also the lives of the people they help today. We came away from such a trip with an even greater sense of purpose and with the knowledge that we play a small, but hopefully integral part, in putting some of these needy children into schools and helping to equip them with what we believe is one of the best possible assets to try to fight their way out of poverty, an education.

Until next month.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kenneth Ng", with a stylized flourish underneath.

Kenneth Ng