



News from DEPDC

DEPDC Development and
Education Program for
Daughters and Communities

Volume 1, Issue 1

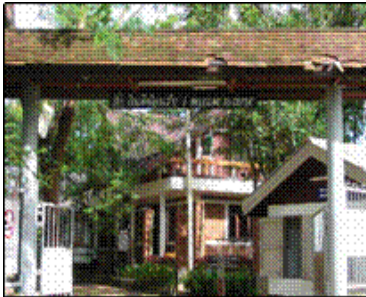
April 2003

You are reading the new DEPDC email newsletter

DEPDC is a community-based organisation offering education and full-time accommodation for children to prevent them from being trafficked into the sex industry or other exploitative child-labor situations. DEPDC is independent from any religious or political connection relying on grants and donations to maintain its work.

This is the first issue of the email newsletter of DEPDC sharing recent events, current issues, and progress here at DEPDC.

We gladly welcome all comments, ideas and other material.



DEPDC's website has been updated with new pictures and stories.

Have a look:
www.depdc.org

Mekong Regional Indigenous Child Rights Home — MRICRH

The past decade has seen significant growth in trafficking in people worldwide, with devastating consequences for the millions of individuals, families, and communities affected by this crime. Victims of trafficking in the Mekong Sub Region comprise both women and children of Thai nationality,

Child Protection and Rights Centre - CPR

After 10 years of working in long term prevention Sompop began to recognise the need in his community for an emergency rescue and shelter service. During 2000 he convened several meetings with Government Organizations, NGOs, local businesses and community organisations in the Mae Sai district to present his idea for a Child Protection and Rights (CPR) service, coordinated by DEPDC yet involving a network of partners. Thus, CPR Mae Sai was born.

Mae Sai district is the first in Thailand with a network like this. In 2001 CPR Mae Sai worked within the constraints of the DEPDC resources, but in 2002 the service was fully funded by the Embassy of Finland, Bangkok. CPR now operates 24 hours and employs 9 staff members.

CPR Mae Sai takes on the task of prevention, protection and interven-

tion on behalf of children through rescuing, counseling, and case follow-up. CPR is contacted by children, parents, teachers, reporters, other child rights organisations, or outsiders who have observed violations of children's rights. The CPR Mae Sai staff then help the child in a way best suited to each individual case. CPR Mae Sai staff are social workers trained in the areas of child protection, law, psychology and emergency work. In 2002 staff from CPR Mae Sai worked with the Mae Sai police in a collaborative program for first time drug offenders.

CPR Mae Sai is one of the major activities in the Chiang Rai Province Master Plan for Child Development prepared by ILO/IPEC partners in 1998.

In 2002, CPR Mae Sai handled 183 cases; currently there are 9 children living in the Emergency Shelter.

This success has seen funders request that the CPR Mae Sai model be replicated in many districts of the Chiang Rai Province. To this end DEPDC began operation last November of another CPR in the District of Mae Salong. (See MRIRCH story below)

now a minority, women and children of ethnic hill tribe minorities who reside in Thailand without citizenship and foreign women from Burma, China and Laos who now comprise the majority of victims. Many come to Thailand seeking jobs and new opportunities, but are quickly trapped in a system of abuse with nowhere to turn. As the US Government turns the spotlight this blatant abuse of human rights, NGO's in Thailand are turning their attention to combating this phenomena. For the past 4 years, Sompop has been quietly circulating a proposal for a Half Way Home to care for and repatriate women and children who have fled or been rescued from brothels in Thailand. Luckily for these women USAID via The Asia Foundation is funding DEPDC to operate a Half Way Home, opening last November under the title, Mekong Region Indigenous Child Rights Home, (MRI CRH), incorporating the Half Way Home and a Child Protection and Rights (CPR) Centre for Hill Tribe Children.

Given the illegal and fluid nature of trafficking neither Governments nor NGOs can be effective by

themselves. Coordinated and complementary efforts are essential within countries and across borders¹ thus the MRICRH is operated in conjunction with the Government Hill Tribe Development Centre with plans for several cross border projects.

During time at the Half Way Home the necessary administrative and legal issues for the repatriation of the girls are expedited as well as extensive research conducted and assessments made into both their case history, for necessary police reports and their home situations to ensure a safe repatriation. The girls also participate in self development activities.

Currently there are two young sisters trafficked from the Yunnan Province in China and two girls from Burma waiting to return home as well as several emergency cases from the local hill tribe villages.

¹Framework for action to combat trafficking in children for labour exploitation in the Mekong sub-region, ILO/IPEC discussion paper, Sub-regional consultation, 22-24 July 1998, Bangkok, p.11



Sompop's word



As there are many new projects starting and a lot changing within the past year, we decided to launch the DEPDC email newsletter. We want to tell you what goes on at DEPDC now.

If you returned to DEPDC today, you would be surprised. A new administration and multi-function building is being built with the generous assistance of the Embassy of Japan, Bangkok. It will have, among other things, room for community meetings and enough room for the very popular Patak school and its growing number of students as well as meeting rooms, counseling rooms and common rooms. More than one hundred fruit trees are being planted and most of the space will be turned to green grass for the children to play.

Since last October we have a new Centre Manager, Khun Ornuch

The Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation has maintained a continuous presence in Thailand since 1954. The Asia Foundation programs currently promote civic participation, ensure constitutional supremacy and the rule of law, and enhance good governance through effective counter-corruption measures and respect for human rights. They tell us why they support DEPDC:

Always happy to pose for the camera!



Lerdkulladilok. She has taken on the daily running of DEPDC, which has freed me to concentrate on further developing cross-border projects. DEPDC is coordinating a study tour to Lao PDR, Yunnan province in China and Burma to network with NGOs and Government departments in those countries to further develop three new projects. CHILDLINE, a helpline modeled on the successful CHILDLINE India, will operate internationally. The Half Way Home is working on repatriations and The Mekong Youth Network will teach youth leaders from the Mekong countries to network and operate child protection projects in their home countries.

DEPDC is strengthening its work in anti-trafficking while continuing to give the possibility of education to children at risk. 35 new children will be admitted to DEPDC in May when school starts again. I am delighted that DEPDC is able to give a chance to so many new children and to initiate our cross-border relationships.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter.

"The Asia Foundation is supporting DEPDC because it focuses on the origin of the problem. And with latest initiatives on anti-trafficking in women and children, we think DEPDC has taken the lead in adopting a comprehensive approach, ranging from prevention, protection, and reintegration. Strategically, DEPDC is located in an area where trafficking in women and children problems are prevalent, as the gate, a transit site and the place where return-victims could stay for their recovery stage."



Morning Assembly at the Patak School

Funders & donors

International Funders

• Co-Operaid, Switzerland
Patak School and Vocational Training

• Embassy of Japan
Buildings and vehicles

• USAID via The Asia Foundation
MRICRH

DEPDC would also like to thank all of our **Individual Donors** in 2002/2003 for their generosity that allows DEPDC to care for over 250 children a day:

- Catherine Taylor Hell, Canada
- Craig Niles, Thailand
- David Mickler, Thailand
- Heidemarie & Lutz Brasal, Germany
- Jaime K. Hansen, USA
- Jane McBeal, USA
- Jaqui & Alan Kanuck, USA
- Joy Hardin, USA
- In memory of Cecil John Lawrence, UK
- Katherine Hutchison, Australia
- Michael Rook, Germany
- National Peace Corps Association
Country of Service Group Friends of Thailand, USA
- Panjamaporn Sethjinda, Thailand
- Prayong Boonsoong, Thailand
- Rainer Hirsch and Friends, Germany
- Raymond Dougherty, Hong Kong
- Robyn Stewart and Friends, Australia
- Samuel & Fahi, Singapore
- Sarah Hassler, USA
- Steven Schaufele, Taiwan
- Toshima Ando, Japan
- Viniya Nina Polvanich, USA
- Wouter Piet, Hong Kong

A SPECIAL thank you to the following donors who have been supporting DEPDC for over **7 years** each:

- Jay Morse, USA
- Jude Mannion, New Zealand
- Maxine Shapiro, USA
- Tim Fletcher, UK

Sompop's dream is to have chapters of DEPDC fundraising groups around the world dedicated to raising money each year. If you are interested in running a fundraising event for DEPDC we have English language flyers can send you as well as providing any assistance for your fundraising efforts. The full time accommodation and support of children to remain in education has no one main funder and relies on the generosity of individuals such as yourself. We look forward to hearing from you, please email us at info@depdc.org



New Case at MRICRH: Ma Lee

With a dream to make a better life for herself, Ma Lee set out with her cousin to find work and new opportunities in Thailand. Ma Lee had seen young women in her village return from Thailand with wealth that afforded new stylish clothes, jewelry, and a bigger home for the family filled with modern appliances and even a car to drive. Upon graduating from Junior High, Ma Lee did not wish to continue studying. She helped her parents to sell rice, which provided an income to comfortably provide for their basic needs. Since opportunities within her village were few, Ma Lee, a mere 16 years old, packed up her courage, a small handbag of belongings, and her shining smile as she set out to make her mark in the big world.

Yet, with limited knowledge about the migration system, Ma Lee fell victim to a complex web of traffickers who bought and sold her through many transactions passing Ma Lee from her home village in the Yunnan Province,

China, to Myanmar, and finally to northern Thailand. After many days of travel passing between one trafficker to the next and even spending several nights in jail for lacking the proper documentation, Ma Lee was sold to a massage parlor owner. There, she learned that this type of establishment frequently also expected sex work from the laborers as well. After a distressing month of being trafficked to Thailand, during which Ma Lee was lied to, threatened, abused, and sold, Ma Lee finally found someone she could trust to help her escape the massage parlor. This new friend then brought her to a place of shelter and care.

Ma Lee now resides at the safe shelter of the Mekong Regional Indigenous Child Rights Home (MRICRH) where she is involved in the life development and skills training activities. Here, Ma Lee has learned about the realities and dangers of human trafficking, labor exploitation, and her rights as a child and a member of the human race. She clearly has a gift for learning and seeks to use

this opportunity to broaden her knowledge and skills. Daily, Ma Lee invests great effort in learning the Thai language, developing agricultural skills, practicing traditional handicraft techniques, cooking a variety of ethnic dishes, and also studying English. During the past three months at the MRICRH, Ma Lee has discovered that she enjoys studying and aspires to return to school.

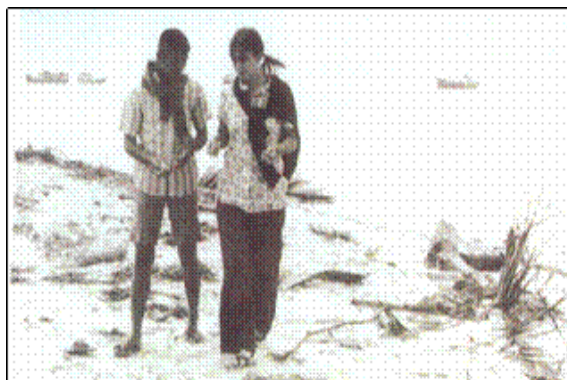
Yet, the most important lesson she has learned is that home and family are more special than material goods. Ma Lee longs to return home and waits while the MRICRH staff members visit her home and village, arrange for her safe return, and help Ma Lee establish a plan of action to take once she returns home. Ma Lee's experience at MRICRH has changed her mind about the value of education. She dreams now that education will open different doors to the big world that may someday allow her to safely spread her wings and make a positive difference – just as the staff of the MRICRH has made a real difference in her life.

Becky & Sompop

In 1972 a young peace corps Volunteer, Becky, arrives in Surat Thani, Southern Thailand to teach high school English. One of her students is a 15-year old boy. He plays the melodion, draws beautiful pictures, is hard-working and shows initiative, he also learns to speak and write English very quickly, his name is Sompop Jantraka.

Sompop is from an extremely poor family, but few people know this. "Pop" as Becky calls him, is always cheerful, friendly, and helpful-to-everyone.

Jump forward 22 years to 1994 and the young Sompop is now a 37-year old man, founder and director of DEPDC, an NGO dedicated to helping young girls in the north of Thailand avoid a life of exploitative and dangerous labour. At this time Sompop's work is drawing international attention and he is invited to exchange ideas with his human rights counterparts in America, as part of the American Embassy's International Visitors Program (IVP). Sompop has never forgotten Becky. He asks IVP to help him locate her.



Teacher & student

*Becky and Sompop
1972*

Story continues page 4

IVP searches the web for colleges in Massachusetts, on America's East Coast. While the Boston Peace Corps writes a newsletter article: "Looking for Becky".

IVP turns up a college student with the same family name as Becky's. This student is able to put IVP in touch with her and they arrange for a reunion with Sompop in Washington DC. Now, more than two decades since her Peace Corps service, Becky surprises her former student with a welcoming note on arrival at his hotel: "You have found me!"

The reunion is an emotional one. Sompop is overwhelmed that he can now tell his mentor what he has done with his life and Becky is amazed to learn that her Peace Corps service has made such a difference to someone's life. Sompop recalls the struggles he faced everyday as a child. Unknown even to Becky, Sompop would go off to practice his mus-

ic at lunchtime because he did not have enough money for food, and each night he would sleep someplace different. Sompop says that he was "a rough kid headed for no good in life" until he met Becky, who nurtured his good traits changing his life's path forever.

As for the enthusiastic Peace Corps Volunteer, when she returned home, Becky started on a Master's Degree in teaching and soon found her experiences in Thailand were invaluable in the U.S. She helped to start a school at one of the emergency camps set up hastily to receive refugees during the last days of the Vietnam war. Her camp eventually received more than 60,000 Southeast Asians. To this day, Becky is working with immigrants from many countries and is assisting them with resettlement. She still speaks some Thai, helping her relate easily to her city's Hmong community.

Even now, everyone at DEPDC



DEPDC Staff: Sureerat Pitakthitikul

Sureerat has been at DEPDC for many years. Initially she came to DEP to be able to continue her studies as her family is very poor and could not have afforded to pay for her school. She completed grades 7, 8 and 9 while staying at DEPDC and then participated in the Leadership Training supported by UNICEF as well as completing grades 10, 11, and 12 at a non-formal education centre. She then worked in a shop that sold videos and was also a travel agent. But she did not enjoy this work as she did not get to use her mind and the work was not flexible or creative. So she returned to DEPDC.

First she worked on case follow-up for 9 months. Then she moved to become a teacher at Patak school for three years. Patak school is a free school supported by DEPDC for local children who don't have identity cards or citizenship and thus have no access to Government schools. The children are taught the same subjects taught at traditional schools. The parents of many of the children have come from Burma and can't speak or write Thai, or they are hill tribe people who speak their own language. This is the only place for these children to go to school.

About a year ago Sureerat began work at the CPR Mae Sai. "I am doing follow-ups on children that have been referred to us. I go through their cases and if needed, I speak to lawyers and doctors to know what should and will be

done next and to be sure the children get the right treatment and assistance they need. I visit the homes of the children to talk to the parents and to assess the conditions there. I teach life skills to the children as they often have not been taught about hygiene, manners, and social skills. Sometimes the work is sad, when you see children that have been abused or neglected by their parents. But when the children finally start smiling, it is very rewarding."



Sureerat is also studying for a Degree in Community Development at Rajapat Institute in Chiang Rai. She is currently in her third year and the education lasts four years. During her free time she studies for her degree. She also makes picture frames at home with her friend and they sell them. As Sureerat belongs to Akha hill tribe, she is making use of her handicraft skills taught at home.

She thinks that if she hadn't come to DEPDC, she would not have made it as far as where she is today. And with her enthusiasm, she'll probably go far. She has already been chosen to represent Asia as a reciprocal volunteer in Finland for six months next fall. Good luck! Chook di!

Financial Accountability

Recently, with the assistance of the Asia Foundation, a training organisation in Bangkok, an Individual Donor and several relatives of our Centre Manager, Khun Oranuch, DEPDC is endeavoring to improve and work towards a transparent accounting system. We have implemented new software and will this year have several of our income streams for 2002 independently audited by a firm in Bangkok. The re-organisation of the DEPDC Accounts is an on-going process in assuring our funders and donors that their donations go directly to helping those children in need.

FROM PAGE 3 BECKY AND SOMPOP

knows Becky as Sompop's 'Peace Corps Mom' and Becky still calls Sompop by his childhood nickname 'Pop'. He says it reminds him of his school days long ago.

Sompop says that "English took care of (him)" while Becky recalls "It was amazing to see how fast Pop mastered enough English to communicate with me, discovering that language-learning was one of his young gifts." After 31 years, Becky is "incredibly proud of how Sompop has used his life and education to offer hope for a bright future to so many children and their families."

This remarkable story reminds us all to value compassion and caring. It demonstrates the amazing wealth that human beings can bring to each other by simply nurturing a desire to learn. Sompop says "If people get a helping hand when they are young, maybe in the future, after ten years, they will help others". And so it goes.

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This newsletter has been written and edited by Emma Nicholson, Parla Norha and Angela Ortloff.

DEPDC
P.O. Box 10
Mae Sai
Chiang Rai 57130
Thailand

Tel +66 (0)53 733 186,
642 599
Fax +66 (0)53 642 415

<http://www.depdc.org>

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b) transfer money to Bank of Ayudhaya Public Company Ltd, Mae Sai, Chiang Rai, Thailand; account name DEPDC; account number 331-1-05358-6

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