



News from DEPDC

Development and Education
Program for Daughters and
Communities

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September

Computers come to DEPDC!

In July DEPDC were the lucky hosts for 4 days of a very generous group of American youth. Traveling with the organisation, Lao Family Development (LFD) the 10 youth were part of a project called Connexions. All the young people were from Cambodian American and Lao American families living in California in the United States of America.

Connexions is a project created to address educational, cultural and occupational issues that these young Americans face. Coming from non-English speaking backgrounds these youth struggle to balance bicultural identities and maintain ties to traditional cultural values while participating in American urban culture, facing issues associated with poverty and violence they have limited opportunities to move out of their situations.

Initially youth attend a 10 month long training course in California focused on building technical skills and helping students master academic skills needed for success in higher education.

New children at DEPDC

Following the graduation of the final year students of DEPDC, the task arose for staff to allocate the next set of places to children in the area. The new case selection process aims not only to select the children who are to receive assistance, but also to gather information on the children in the area and their related problems. The main target group consists of girls and boys aged 7-18 years, orphaned and abandoned children and those who are believed to be at-risk of trafficking.

In total, 635 children were surveyed within the DEPDC catchment area. This is not easy as this includes not only Mae Sai district, but also Doi Luang and ten districts in the Chiang Rai Province.

Over the space of three weeks, the team coordinated and con-

The group then attended a 4 week action project in Thailand comprised of a one-week orientation on culture and youth issues followed by a two-week service learning project and a final week of home stays with Lu Mien and Cambodian families.

While in Thailand the youth visited DEPDC, taking part in a study tour through in Chiang Rai with the Director, Sompop learning about the social issues of the area that necessitate a project such as DEPDC. Participating in structured activities with the younger kids and talking with and making friends with the older kids. Nai On Saechao, age 16, and Project Leader of the group remembers; "When I was at the school (DEPDC) the kids I saw looked very happy, but when I learned about why they were there I felt really bad for them. It got me thinking about how lucky I am to have parents who take care of me and put clothes on me. I was very happy there because I was playing with the kids. I felt happy to see them having fun with us and laughing. It reminded me of my brother, sister, and cousins playing."

Connexions also bought with them 6 computer terminals to DEPDC which they helped set up and create a much need computer lab for DEPDC's children and staff. Training is already

taking place on the computers managed by Anne, the co ordinator of DEPDC's Research and Information Centre.

Michael Goldberg, LFD Project Coordinator, shares the benefits he believes these young Americans will derive from spending time at DEPDC "Connexions will foster a range of academic, social, cultural and occupational competencies, but more importantly, it will build on the participants' most valuable assets – their talents, skills, and dreams. Their experience will free them to choose their own paths in life with greater self-awareness, confidence, and renewed optimism."

DEPDC is grateful to Michael and his team of young people for taking the time to spend with us for giving us the opportunity to make friends, increase computer competency and help bridge the digital divide.



The New Computer Room



A festival day to welcome new children

ducted visits to gather information. Through the work they aimed to develop relationships and create a network between village leaders and their communities. They hoped to be able to categorize the children according to their problems and use this information to decide whether and which kinds of assistance could be offered. Factors studied included education, health, drug addiction and family problems.

Information collected reflected that 470 of the surveyed children had problems with their citizenship and did

not have legal identities, therefore excluding them from state education and health care. Twenty eight of the cases were addicted to drugs such as amphetamines and sixty four were HIV positive. The information gathered will be used to paint a general picture of the problems affecting children in the local area.

The DEPDC team spent four days going through all information collected in order to effectively allocate available assistance.

Thirty five places were made available for DEP education and full-time accommodation and two placements for vocational training. Forty children received educational funding, sixty two cases were subsequently followed up, and twenty were transferred to other organisations.

In May the new children moved into DEPDC. There was a welcome ceremony, and lots of tears. Now, several months on, everyone has settled in and staff are following up on cases.



Sompop's words



Welcome to the 2nd edition of the DEPDC email newsletter. Thank you for your feedback about our 1st edition. I am pleased to say the newsletter is available on our website and we have had many people sign up to receive it.

Recently, I have been focusing much of my energy on cross-border networking. Trafficking unites all concerned agencies because the problems associated with trafficking know no boundaries or borders. Children are trafficked from the neighboring areas of Burma, China's Yunnan Province and Laos into Thailand. While DEPDC has traditionally worked on trafficking prevention in Thailand we realise trafficking prevention must be implemented in all neighboring regions if Southeast Asia is ever to see an end to human trafficking.

In late August the need for better cross-border networking brought me to Laos and China to meet with

many organisations working in the areas of child protection. The trip gave me a chance to share DEPDC's work with other agencies, learn of others efforts and problems and pave a way for increased cross-border communication.

In September I attended The Child Helpline International conference, initiated to increase networking among help lines internationally and to assist countries such as Thailand in the implementation of a 24 hour national hotline for children. It is hoped one day Thailand will have a helpline as successful as CHILDLINE India, which reaches out to 1 million children per year.

In regards to child protection, one missed child is one too many. It is at the heart of DEPDC to continue networking efforts so that, together we can overcome the exploitation of children.

Although I am focusing much of my energy on increasing international networking, I remain committed to the children at DEPDC whose risk for exploitation is the reason the DEPDC remains in existence.

Funders & donors

International Funders

- Co-Operaid, Switzerland: Patak School and Vocational Training
- Embassy of Japan, Bangkok: Buildings and vehicles
- Embassy of Finland, Bangkok: CPR Mae Sai
- USAID via The Asia Foundation: MRICRH (Half Way Home)
- Embassy of USA, Bangkok: MSC Mapping Study
- Whole Child Initiative, USA: MSC Case Study Documentation

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- Tamami Kawaura, Thailand
- Ramesh Kakkad, Japan
- Maxine Shapiro, USA
- Katayama Takahiro, Japan
- Prayong Boonsong, Thailand

CO-OPERAID

"I believe education is very important to me because if I cannot read or write, then other people who are smarter than me will take advantage of me or trick me. If I am literate, I will understand and be able to communicate. If I do not have an education, then it is like being blind."

*Interview, Patak School student
November 2002, Burma Issues
(www.burmaissues.org)*

CO-OPERAIAD is a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) based in Switzerland taking up the task of providing aid for development projects and in emergency situations. CO-OPERAIAD functions in cooperation with national and international aid organizations. In the project countries, it bases its activities on the local partner organizations, such as DEPDC.

CO-OPERAIAD raises funds via private donors, individual child sponsorships as well as project contributions from the Swiss government, various public institutions and other NGOs.

A regular flow of financial donations allows CO-OPERAIAD to plan its projects on a long-term basis and to en-

ter into multiple-year commitments with its local partners.

CO-OPERAIADs work with DEPDC began 6 years ago in 1997 with the support of the Patak Kindergarten and Primary School, where children from refugee families, attend primary school. One year later CO-OPERAIAD began to support the Vocational Training Programme for girls and boys. This enables girls, boys and young women at-risk of trafficking to acquire practical sewing skills increasing their employability and giving them a skill with which they can earn a living.

For monitoring purposes, Mr Edi Náf, CO-OPERAIAD board member, regularly visits the DEPDC projects.

The CO-OPERAIAD director, Dr. Rao Satapati, visited DEPDC in August 2002 and inspected the progress of projects.

So, why does CO-OPERAIAD support DEPDC's programs? David Mayer, Manager of Sponsorships at CO-OPERAIAD says: "According to its guiding principles CO-OPERAIAD enables refugee children as well as children from needy and socially disadvantaged families to receive basic schooling. After the basic schooling we enable young, women and men to attend secondary school or vocational training courses. The two DEPDC projects Patak School and Vo-

ational Training cater to these target groups, with special emphasis on girls, providing them with the means of becoming self-sufficient and self-determined in their future plans, and thereby avoiding sexual exploitation. CO-OPERAIAD supports these projects, because we are convinced that they have a substantial positive impact on the lives of disadvantaged children and youth."

DEPDC thanks CO-OPERAIAD for their ongoing and long-term support of these two projects crucial to DEPDC's trafficking prevention work.



Dr Rao Satapati, Director, CO-OPERAIAD with students from the Patak School when he visited DEPDC in August 2002.



DEPDC Staff: Pa Ou

It is easy to forget about those behind the scenes, however without such people, an organisation like DEPDC would never be possible. One such person is our cook, Da Rangsi, or "Pa Ou" to all who know her. An employee at DEPDC for the past 6 years, Pa Ou has for much of this time been responsible for the planning and preparation of three hot, vegetarian meals a day for all the children and staff. With currently around 80 students living on site, and another 150 children coming for the local day school, Pa Ou has certainly been one of the busiest workers at the center.

A native of Burma, Pa Ou came to Thailand 7 years ago with her husband looking for better work and living opportunities for herself and her family. Fortunately, Pa Ou has a "fixed" Thai ID card, meaning that her and her family are able to stay in Thailand and have access to all basic education and health services, but are unable to travel outside of the Chiang Rai Province. Once a year she returns to see family residing in Burma.

Pa Ou and her husband started off by renting 30 Rai of land in the Mae Sai area, where they grew rice and vegetables, and raised fish. Tragically, a year later her husband was killed

in a motorbike accident, leaving her with two young children to raise on her own. Upon hearing of this, DEPDC offered Pa Ou work at the center and placing her two children, a boy and girl now aged 12 and 14 respectively, in the DEPDC program.

Each morning at 6am, Pa Ou heads to the local market, and depending on what's available, decides what to cook for the day. This market food is also supplemented with home-grown organic food from the DEPDC garden during the winter season, from Novem-



Pa Ou in her kitchen with one of the young CPR kids.

ber to February, when the harvests are ready. As DEPDC serves only vegetarian food, these meals often consist of the many Thai variations of rice or noodles with vegetables and some form of soy protein. She also buys the soy milk that is heated and served nightly, a local favorite for many Thai people.

With the construction of a new, large kitchen the children at DEPDC now prepare their own breakfast and lunches with supervision from staff and so Pa Ou is free to spend more time on her hobby and additional source of income, weaving. Three traditional looms are set up at DEPDC, where staff and girls weave traditional Thai style cloth that is made into, scarves, hand bags, loin cloths, tablecloths, etc., to be sold at DEPDC. Half the proceeds from these crafts go to Pa Ou and the girls as a way for them to earn some spending money.

Pa Ou seems to very much enjoy her lifestyle here at DEPDC. "I really am impressed with the program here at DEPDC," she says. "The fact that they help the local kids by sending them to school, and also have helped me and my family so much is really incredible."

Pa Ou's work and contributions at DEPDC are also incredible, and despite being one of the behind the scenes workers, she is certainly noticed and appreciated by all those living (and eating!) here.

A Volunteer's story

For three months this year DEPDC was fortunate enough to have a Volunteer dedicated to working in the organic gardens. Megan Seymour is a young American who was traveling in Thailand with WWOOF (Willing Workers On Or-



Megan working with staff member Pa Od.

ganic Farms). Megan came to us with a fantastic command of the Thai Language, quickly made friends with the kids and impressed everyone with her willingness to work in the fields under the blazing Thai sun! This is an account of her time here; we hope she will be followed up by other WWOOFers passing through Thailand.

I feel my time with DEPDC has been both personally rewarding and a wonderful chance to see a growing orchard and garden along with a sweet group of growing children. There have been many changes and improvements to the centre's garden. After my first week of transplanting eggplants into the shade of a tree, which substituted as a nursery, bulldozers came and leveled the foundation for the new Patak School building as well as creating the seven terraced garden orchard. It seemed as though I came at the perfect time to add a few touches to DEPDC's organic garden while planning the layout for the 200 fruit trees which included papaya, rambutaan and mangosteen.

I noticed there was no composting or natural fertilizers being made. So with the help of Pa Oak, our only employee, kitchen staff, children and Volunteers our first compost bin was made. We quickly filled the bin with refuse from the DEPDC kitchen, which makes over 300 meals a day for students, staff and Volunteers, the friendly folks at the dairy farm and the workers at the garlic and rice factory nearby.

The children enthusiastically helped in planting fruit trees in the newly shaped terraces. DEPDC is now working towards a sustainable organic fruit orchard. We have also planted corn, as it is a very hardy plant to grow in Thailand's harsh, hot dry season. At the start of the monsoon season DEPDC will plant a variety of vegetables and beans along with remaining fruit trees. The children now wait with sweet anticipation for the freshly planted orchard to bear fruit. I hope that new Volunteers will come to continue my work in DEPDC's growing agriculture section.



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Preyed Upon: A Look At the Denial of Citizenship For Society's Most Vulnerable

To those who live along the borders of Thailand, citizenship has come to mean much more than it does for others. It has come to stand for the safety of belonging, the security of a place to live, the benefits of being part of a society... 'We cannot travel. We cannot get access to health services. Our children cannot go to school. We cannot transact legal business. There are so many things we cannot do.'¹

Those denied citizenship are exploited by not having basic human rights and find themselves at an increased risk for many abusive situations. Dr. Feingold of UNICEF verbalises that, "Research has shown the single greatest risk factor for trafficking is a lack of citizenship." Dr. Feingold isn't the only one who feels this way.

Current research by UNESCO has shown that the lack of citizenship is the single greatest risk factor for highland minority girls and women in Thailand to be trafficked or otherwise exploited. Lacking citizenship, they are often employed in informal and exploitative labour arrangements and, because of the residence and travel restrictions imposed on them, the further young minority people travel away from their communities, the more vulnerable they become.²

Many people from minority groups in the northern area surrounding DEPDC lack formal Thai citizenship. So large is the problem of citizenship rights,

there are an estimated five hundred thousand people currently living in Thailand who lack citizenship³.

In Thailand, people without identity papers are restricted by where they can live, work and travel. In the region where DEPDC is located, those lacking citizenship aren't allowed to travel more than five kilometers away from the Mae Sai/Tachilek border crossing point. Police ensure this law by checkpoints along the roads where cars and busses are routinely stopped and passenger are checked for identity.

Children lacking citizenship, even those who were born in Thailand yet hold no citizenship, are discriminated against. Children face difficulties enrolling in government schools, employment is limited and with no proper citizenship, exploitation is common.

"In Thailand you have to prove to be Thai" say's Sompop as he talks about citizenship rights many hill-tribe peoples are denied. Sompop raises the question, "Why must people be forced to prove their nationality? The law says a person is innocent until proven guilty, so why is a child not Thai until he/she can prove they are Thai? Why is it not, if a child can't prove they are from elsewhere, then they are Thai? The way in which people must prove their identity to become 'Thai' is, according to Sompop, "a human rights violation."

The fact that children are not accepted as citizens brings to light an underlying belief in society that children aren't important. This attitude pushes children down instead of uplifting them. A spark of passion shows through Sompop's face and bursts through his mouth as he describes the ways in which the oppression of children manifests itself in today's society. "When someone's behavior is bad they are equated with a child; this is discrimination towards

DEPDC's website is regularly updated with stories, volunteer journals & a new FAQ — Take a look!

www.depdc.org

children! It shows an underlying social value that looks down upon children instead of lifting them up." Sompop believes value of children needs to be taken to lawmakers saying, "Children should not have to prove themselves to obtain citizenship".⁴

The Thai Nationality Act B.E. 2508 (1965) explicitly states under Article 7 Section 3 that any person born in the Kingdom of Thailand can obtain Thai nationality by birth (for those born on or before Feb. 25, 1992).⁵

We pose the question, why is it so many hilltribe members and their children are denied Thai citizenship? The day hilltribes are given their basic human rights bestowed on them by Thailand's own constitution will be a day towards victory over the trafficking of children within Thailand for sexual exploitation. The day children are born in Thailand with citizenship will be a day society chooses to invest in its children.

¹ Bangkok Post "A Question of Identity." June 9, 2002

² Interview with Dr. Feingold, UNICEF August 11, 2003.

³ "Trafficking Project" UNESCO pamphlet

⁴ Interview with Sompop Jantraka August 28, 2003

⁵ Bangkok Post "A Question of Identity." June 9, 2002

DEPDC info

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