



Kids International
Development Society

NEWSLETTER

January 24, 2011

Dear Friends,



We have now been on the Burma border for one week. One of our first stops is always to Agape Learning Centre. K.I.D.S. has been supporting this terrific program for three years and it is amazing to see how far it has come. We bought a piece of land for this little ramshackle old school/orphanage (that was running on a hope and a prayer) two years ago, after we met the director David and his wife Min Min. We partnered with Mae Tao Clinic and purchased a large piece of land. David and the children cleared the land of brush and moved the bamboo classrooms and living quarters. If you could see it today you would never believe where it started. David's amazing resilience, enthusiasm, and compassionate philosophy have drawn other donors and now there are buildings for: the nursery,

545 Vancouver Ave. Nanaimo, BC Canada V9S 4G6
Phone: 1-250-754-0180
www.kidsdevelopmentsociety.org

kindergarten, primary school, dorms for the children, dorms for the teachers (who all live at the Centre) and a great cooking area. They are raising pigs, chickens, frogs, fish and gourds to help feed the children and it has become a thriving little village for 220 primary aged kids, eighty of which live there full time. Although there has been great progress with the infrastructure there has been a difficulty with food this year as funding for the lunch program dried up and we have been assisting them through this crisis. We will continue to help Agape with their lunch program and buy some needed supplies. The situation in Burma is not good, although Aung San Suu Kyi is out of house arrest the border is closed due to increased fighting inside Burma and more people are fleeing from starvation and persecution.

Last year we purchased a small pickup truck for Agape so that they could pick up children to go to school. David was paying for transportation and it was expensive and difficult as the drivers were not consistent and sometimes not very kind to the children. The truck has been a huge asset for the Centre both for transportation of kids and for buying food. We decided to go with David to take the children home at the end of the day and see where these little ones live. On the three trips to and from the school we dropped kids off at various places. Some families are migrant workers living and working on plantations and in factories, they work long hours for less than a dollar a day and if it were not for David picking the children up they would never attend school and would also be working picking fruit or doing other back breaking jobs. As the families are all refugees they have no human rights but they have work and food from the plantation/factory owners. We dropped other children at the river bank, which divides Thailand and Burma, here small children trailed off into the bush to their little huts on the riverbanks, where their families collect scrap for a living. They all wave with big smiles as they get off the truck and give David a huge smile. David gets up at 5:00 am does the marketing and then makes three trips every morning to collect the children and does the same to take them home at the end of the day. He tells us that he is the head master and like a father and so he must take care of the children and does not trust other drivers. We will continue to help with the maintenance and fuel for the truck.

Through our friends at Room to Grow we heard of another couple of schools that needed help and so off we went on motorcycles to see these programs. The first school we visited had about 90 children attending, with 40 living at the school. The trouble was they had lost their funding for transportation for kids living on nearby plantations/factories and so they could not pick them up. This school also did not have funding for their teachers and the teachers have been volunteering their time to teach and care for the children. Due to funding cuts some programs were not able to receive salaries or food. The headmaster is a very dedicated man and lives and works there 24 hours a day. The school year ends in May so we will support the teachers for the rest of this year and they are hoping to get more funding. We also funded the transportation and we were there the next day when the other 45 children came back to school and there was much rejoicing. We will also buy some hygiene supplies as they have none.

The next school and shelter we visited has 465 children going to school, including two hundred living there. We had heard that they desperately needed improvements to their dining hall, as the kids had nowhere to really sit. We arrived at lunch time, and the food was brought to the students, in huge vats, by a local aid group; mostly rice and cabbage. In a large palm leafed covered area the bowls for lunch were laid out on the dirt floor, the children lined up in front of their bowls and squatted on their haunches not wanting to dirty their uniforms, especially difficult for the girls. We could see how uncomfortable they were, all squeezed together. Our hearts went out to them. We could also see that in the rainy season the lack of a decent roof would make this situation impossible, turning dirt into mud and rice into soup, with the water pouring in from overhead. So needless to say we are building tables, benches and putting on a tin roof. This school does not have funding for the teachers however they volunteer to live with and teach the children, all 20 of them. If the school closes down they can take the tin roofing and the desks and can utilize them at other migrant schools. We hope this is not the case. The situation is difficult but thanks to you we are able to help and no one knows what is around the corner. Look at Agape! Here lives are lived in moments, hours and days and if we can ease a child's life for awhile it is better that not at all.

We are here for 10 more days, building tables and buying supplies. We will write again before we head back to Cambodia.

With much appreciation,
Adrienne and Rick