



# NEWS FROM DEPDC

Development And Education Program For  
Communities And Daughters

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DEPDC

P.O. Box 10

Mae Sai

Chiang Rai 57130

Thailand

Tel +66 (0)53 733 186,

+66 (0)53 642 599

Fax +66 (0)53 642 415

www.depdc.org

info@depdc.org



Sons working the fields at the camp.

## SELF CAPACITY BUILDING CAMP

In the October school holidays last year DEPDC held a 2-week camp for 34 of the children. These children were chosen specially for the camp because of difficulties they were having either at school or at the center. They started each day at 4am with 1/2 an hour of meditation; follow by chores and the preparation of breakfast. Their days were filled with activities and each evening they played sport and participated in group discussion.

One Sunday the children headed out in groups to visit families in the local village. Each group was given a series of questions for the family, to practice community research, and they shared lunch together. On another day the children ventured out into the surrounding hills of Mae Sai to climb the mountains and learn about nature. They also had the opportunity to visit well-known tourist sites including Doi Tung, a beautiful mountain on which the Royal family has a residence.

Visiting a local temple the children were taught about Buddhism. They also had a monk visit the center to talk about Buddhism, karma, the duty of children and how to apply Buddhist teachings to everyday life. He was teaching them to recognise the mistakes they may have made in their own lives, how they could change their behaviours and improve their self esteem. It was not all serious though as he had them laughing over and over again!

In Chiang Saen, about 1 hour from Mae Sai towards the Golden Triangle is an ECPAT supported project that focuses on helping the street children of Mae Sai and surrounding districts, the majority of whom come from Burma. ■

This gave the DEPDC children an opportunity to meet, learn and share experiences with children living in similar circumstances as themselves, to see how other NGO's operate and to learn about other target groups.

One day they visited the jail in Chiang Rai where one of the wardens presented an entertaining and informative talk to the children. They learnt that over 80% of the inmates are in jail because of drug offences. They also discussed the situation of overcrowding at the jail, where rooms meant to sleep 30 men frequently had over 50 men per night. In order to make the experience of jail real and not just statistics and promotional videos, one evening we had a visit from a young man who had spent time in jail who shared his real life experiences with the children and answered questions. On the same theme the children visited the police station in Mae Sai to learn about the work of the police and their fight against drug trafficking.

On October 14, the children watched a documentary video on the famous day in history, in 1973, when student protests led to the formation of a democratic Government in Thailand.

The children participated in agricultural and building projects, learning teamwork, problem solving and the satisfaction of completing a project together.

After the camp staff commented that already they had seen a change in behavior in some of the children who had the opportunity to see the advantage in life they have been given by living at DEPDC, grown closer to their friends and to the staff and enjoyed their school holidays with stimulating, different, challenging and fun activities. ■

## VOLUNTEER IN PRINT

In 2001 DEPDC hosted two American volunteers, Christopher Osborn and Christian Braken. Christopher's diary is now on the DEPDC website and last year was featured in a compilation of dairies and stories - Volunteer Tales: Experiences of Working Abroad, edited by Savita Bailur and Helen Rana. See if you can pick up a copy for some armchair travel reading! ■



Meephiaw Arye

## DAUGHTER TO ITALY

In May 2004, 500 people between the ages of 10 and 17, will come to Florence, Italy, to share their ideas on child labour.

Meephiaw Arye (nickname Mee Ger), an Akha Daughter, living at the DEPDC centre in Mae Sai, will attend the meeting as well! Meephiaw is 16 years old and this will be her first time overseas. The Children's World Congress on child labour (CWC) is the first ever global youth-convened congress on child labour.

The children and youth will direct the activities, make policy decisions, and prepare for follow-up initiatives. Meephiaw is looking forward going to Italy very much. In the first newsletter after the congress she will write a story about her experiences. ■



DEPDC's new building

## NEW BUILDING AT DEPDC SITE

DEPDC is looking forward to their new building being finished in about three months time. The new building is three floors high and is funded by the Embassy of Japan, Bangkok. It will be used as a school, a nursery, a community centre and there will be offices and staff rooms. The building is being built under the contract of Tungka Construction Company by local labourers many of whom are parents of DEPDC children. They will benefit from nearly a years full-time work. ■

# SOMPPOP'S WORD

SA WAT DEE KLAB



*....This year is a very exciting one for DEPDC, we are finally, after years of dreaming, starting our own school...*

This year is a very exciting one for DEPDC, we are finally, after years of dreaming, starting our own school for the children that live full-time at DEPDC who will be integrated in class with the children who currently attend the Patak school. We will no longer have to send our full-time accommodation children to the Government schools in Mae Sai town but instead we will be able to educate them on site, here at DEPDC.

For the past few months the staff have been writing the curriculum which will involve traditional classroom based learning in the morning and out door activities and study tours in the afternoon.

After attending several conferences supported by Ashoka, including "Making Education the Pathway to Peace", in Calcutta, India, in 2002 I have become increasingly interested in the paths of alternative education. For several years now we have known that some of our children are not happy in the standard Government education stream and

we want to offer them an alternative with our own school which we will call 'The Half Day School'. We will start our term in mid May and I look forward to sharing our progress with you in the next newsletter.

Also this year we will begin the Mekong Youth Net project. With seed funding from the Open Society Institute we will be training and working with young people from China, Laos, Thailand and Burma to provide them with leadership training enabling them to return to their own country in 2005 to either work with existing projects focusing on trafficking prevention or to start their own.

The Mekong Youth Net invests in today's youth and ensures trafficking prevention will continue into the next generations, while extending trafficking prevention into areas and to children DEPDC cannot physically help.

Kind regards

Sompop Jantraka  
Founder and Director



Heli and one of the DEPDC Daughters at Loi Kratong.

## ETVO

Each year DEPDC is home to approximately 15 foreign Volunteers who stay anywhere from 3 months to 2 years! Volunteers come from all over the world, Every year DEPDC is host to several Volunteers from Finland who are recruited and introduced to DEPDC by a Finnish programme called ETVO.

ETVO, based in Helsinki, is coordinated by a collaboration of five NGOs. ETVO aims to reduce cultural barriers and prejudices and increase tolerance both in Finland and in developing countries. This is achieved by enabling people to travel to countries not familiar to them and live and work there as unpaid volunteers in local communities

ETVO started their volunteer program in 1995. Twice a year ETVO chooses volunteers to work in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

People who are chosen to be volunteers have an interest and motivation to learn about a new culture, they are adaptable and interested to learn a new language. Volunteers are selected by application and

*...I wanted to get an opportunity to learn of different cultures and daily life, habits and culture...*

"entrance exams", they are interviewed in English and observed while taking part in a group situation.

Before traveling to destination countries ETVO provides new volunteers with two training courses. At these training courses Volunteers and ETVO leaders address basic issues of destination countries including health and life style as well as looking at development theories. Group conversations and role play are major learning methods. ETVO wants to encourage their Volunteers to think and problem solve independently

One major advantage of being able to work with a sending organisation like ETVO is that future Volunteers have the opportunity to meet with previous DEPDC Volunteers, to ask questions and exchange experiences.

Before their placement, during and after volunteering, volunteers compile reports of their experiences covering personal goals, cultural adaptation, cultural differences, development issues, learning experiences and cultural exchange.

To date, DEPDC has hosted 7 Finnish Volunteers and in February will welcome 4

*...Our website [www.depdc.org](http://www.depdc.org) now has 11 Languages available!*

*Take a look at new stories photos, and journals today!*

new Volunteers to work in the office in Mae Sai, the Half Way Home in Mae Salong and in Doi Luang, teaching English and helping to look after the girls.

DEPDC's most recent ETVO Volunteer was Heli Katajisto. She shares some of her motivation with us: "I (volunteered) because I wanted to get an opportunity to learn of different cultures and daily life doing something purposeful with good goals, ... supporting children's and women's rights. I believed that volunteering abroad would give (me) totally new experiences of ... daily life, habits and culture. I hoped that these kind of experiences could give me an opportunity to grow on a personal level, too. I thought that after volunteering abroad I could be more able to understand foreigner people and receive more client centred view point in my occupational therapists work in Finland." ■

## CORRECTION

In our last newsletter, September 2003, the article Preyed Upon: A Look At the Denial Of Citizenship For Society's Most Vulnerable stated that Dr David A. Feingold works for UNICEF, when in fact he is working in Bangkok with UNESCO, we apologise for this inaccuracy. ■



Aser and Pai in front of their loom

### DEPDC STAFF: ASER & PAI

For several years, DEPDC's Production Section has played a vital part of the centre's daily activities. Under a tin roof next to the vegetable gardens, three traditional looms and several spinning wheels have been set up to provide a space for this production, which includes multi-coloured scarves, tablecloths, skirts and other materials. These are all sold for profit along with other handicrafts items in DEPDC's small Co-op shop, or are made specifically for individual orders.

Each day, three women work hard at the looms. Two of these women, Pai and Aser, were kind enough to share with us their experiences with DEPDC and the production section.

Pai, a member of the Ethnic Hill-tribe, Akha, from Burma, first came to Thailand at the age of 16. She left her village and family of 13 to find work in Southern Thailand, where she ended up in a restaurant in the Phuket area, working as a child labourer. After two years of hard working conditions, the Thai Social Welfare Department helped Pai leave her

*..“I cannot speak because I am so grateful. I cannot believe how lucky I am to have come here...”*

workplace. She was sent to a NGO similar to DEPDC and after a failed repatriation attempt was transferred to DEPDC in Mae Sai. Having exceeded the age of primary and secondary schooling, Pai came to work morning and evening shifts in the kitchen, but spent most of her free time by the looms. She was initially attracted by the weaving techniques and the chance to produce something. Today, she spends most of her time weaving, and has recently been teaching the former Vocational Training class. Pai's personal aim is to learn more about specific weaving patterns and techniques, and to continue teaching and sharing her skills.

Working alongside Pai is Aser, a former 'daughter' of DEPDC. Like Pai, she is an Akha woman who came to Thailand from Burma at a young age, in the hope of pursuing a more prosperous life. At the time there was no school in Aser's small home village of Nah Hoo (see article on back page for further information). Aser's parents encouraged her to leave home at the age of fourteen, and so an elder relative who knew of DEPDC accompanied Aser across the border to Mae Sai. As a Burmese illegal immigrant, Aser lacked the appropriate documentation and

was therefore denied access to public education, social or health services. She came straight to DEP where she attended non-formal education alongside the other daughters residing at the centre. After finishing school, Aser began working full-time in the kitchen, the fields and in the weaving room. She sees her sister (Ah Nong, 10 years old) every day. Ah Nong came to DEPDC following their parents' deaths two years ago

When asked about their hopes for the future, neither Aser nor Pai express a wish to return to Burma and the life they would be leading there. The daily chores and working pace at DEPDC seems to suit them both. After so many years here, they have established a close community amongst themselves and other members of staff. Although Pai misses her family, she is grateful for her life here and is eager to stay. She says that "DEPDC is a wonderful opportunity for the kids. I hope it continues in the future". Aser was very emotional when asked about what DEP means to her: "I cannot speak because I am so grateful. I cannot believe how lucky I am to have come here" she said.

As DEPDC expands, both Aser and Pai wish to see the production section grow, too. They would especially like a set of new looms, materials and other accessories to expand their production. In the month before Christmas, Aser says, things were very busy, as several members of staff decided to give DEPDC scarves as Christmas presents! Fortunately, the girls also found time to make a few for themselves... ■



Catherine teaching flower making

### A VOLUNTEER'S STORY

Catherine O'Sullivan was a Volunteer from Australia who lived at DEPDC for 6 months in 2003. She worked exclusively with the DEPDC production section, making bags from donated material, cards from mulberry paper, using cross stitches made by local women and the children at DEPDC and teaching children paper flower making. Catherine assisted in the design of new products, shared her art and craft skills and helped fulfilled several large orders. Catherine is very interested in the traditional handicrafts of Asia and in the community of women

*....Co-operatives of women are forming to enable greater income generation through their skillful and delicate craftwork.*

keeping these traditions alive.

I had read a story in the Australian newspaper of families in the hills of Thailand willing to sell their daughters into prostitution, their need in poverty were so great. My response was to find an organization that supported these girls so that prostitution did not become their life. I found DEPDC. I have worked 6 months at the center, in the production of handicrafts. This work supports the center financially and the children's craft skills.

Here 3 women work with the looms, weaving cloth as longis (sarongs), scarves and bed cloths. The local hand made saa paper, from

the bark of the saa (mulberry) tree, is used to make cards of flowers and of batik. Cross stitch pieces, stitched by the girls and local women, are used as decorative pieces for bags. Cross stitch is the traditional needle work of this area. An abundance of donated cloth has been selected from for sewing of bags, decorated with beads and ribbon. A small shop on site has these articles for sale.

We had circles of flower making, from the saa paper, with the children. The girls are paid for flowers made to be used on cards and for their cross stitch pieces. They are adept with their hands. To be able to offer the children more craft lessons would be a benefit for they have an interest and a desire to create.

My craft interest has enhanced from my time here, my thoughts on returning to Australia are to refine and learn new skills so that I may continue with this work. Co-operatives of women are forming to enable greater income generation through their skillful and delicate craftwork. It is a work worthy of support. ■



### RAAT RETURNS FROM FINLAND

Sureerat Pitakthitikul, a former Daughter and long term employee of DEPDC, returned to Mae Sai last week after six months in Helsinki, Finland.

Raat was selected by KEPA, one of DEPDC's main volunteer sending organisations, to take part in their reverse exchange program run in Helsinki. The program allows international development workers to live and work with Finnish NGO's such as the Mannerheimin-Lastensuojeluliitto (MLL), where Raat was placed. This large organisation runs several projects in and around Finland, including after-school youth centres and counselling to Somalian immigrants in Finland. Having worked in the Childs Rights and Protection Centre (CPR) here in Mae Sai for several years, Raat was well prepared for her new job with MLL's immigration program.

When you have lived your entire life in Thailand, a journey across the world is both exciting and daunting. Prior to her departure, Raat wasn't sure what to expect from her trip to Finland, but knew that she had been given a great opportunity in participating in the program. From day one, Raat was rapidly thrown into the new culture: her host family of four welcomed her to their home in Pakila, and gave her the full Finnish experience throughout her stay: from cross-country skiing to Christmas parties and lots of Finnish food! Raat says: 'I like my food to be spicy, so at first Finnish food didn't taste like anything to me!'. Raat also remembers seeing snow for the first time: 'At first I thought it was something that had fallen on me from the tree! When I realised it was snow I sent a message to all of my friends saying "I've seen snow!"'.

Living in a large city was a first for Raat, who at first was a little overwhelmed by the many

people and the hectic pace of the capital. She was able to see a lot of the countryside, though, on her visits to her Finnish friends and other international participants spread across the country. Although she made close friends with these people and especially her African colleague in Helsinki, she sometimes found it hard to interact with locals. 'Perhaps it was because of the language barrier, but the Finnish people seemed very isolated compared to the Thais. We like to be together in big groups, not by ourselves'. Needless to say, there were countless cultural differences that Raat had to grow used to, and she says she missed Thailand daily.

While her living situation was very successful, Raat felt somewhat frustrated about her place in the office. The language barriers made it difficult for her to communicate with most of the immigrants she had hoped to work closely with. However, she sought other ways to make herself useful and became involved with several of the children's activity groups in the area, where she taught handicrafts and spoke about Thailand and Thai culture with the kids. Before joining the CPR, Raat was a teacher at DEP, so is used to working closely with children. In addition to her teaching, Raat was also able to visit two of the Finnish Red Cross' refugee centres. Raat says that KEPA was especially helpful in co-ordinating project visits like these.

'Going to Finland opened my mind to new experiences and looking at things in a different ways', Raat says. 'We have had Finnish volunteers here for years, but I never knew much about their country'. Raat returns to work with the new Mekong Youth Net program which will select and train young leaders from the Sub-Mekong region. She hopes to draw on her Finnish experience in this job, and make particular use of her much improved English. ■

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Mekong Youth Net

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### NEWSLETTER WRITTEN AND EDITED BY

Heli Katajisto, Kirsten Katsberg, Emma Nicholson, Catherine O'Sullivan and Manon Sluijter.