



Christmas 2014

Very dear foster parents and friends,

Every single one of the 314 children of Le Sourire has her or his story. Each story touches us, bearing most of the time a deep wound from childhood. Here is Suda's story, a 12 year-old Hmong girl, whom we welcomed into our centre last April, along with her little sisters, Kanyarat and Namthip.

Suda's family lives in Ban Thungnanoi, near Chiang Khong, in extreme poverty, obliging the father to look for work in Bangkok. Time passes and Suda's mother hears rumours of her husband's unfaithfulness. When she learns that he has contracted AIDS, she puts an end to her life, leaving behind her three daughters and son.

The father returns to the village and spends his time looking for a new wife, then a third one, then a fourth one, who has four children from a former marriage and with whom he decides to live in Chiang Mai. Suda, her brother and sisters are left on their own in the village where they were born, living here and there with various family members.

This goes on for some years, until the day we hear about the situation and decide to offer our help to these children. The boy wishes to continue his education with monks in a Buddhist temple, so we receive the three girls into our centre, where they adapt easily to their new life. Today they are smiling again.

Suda is a young girl who is very generous, helpful and sensitive to others. We rapidly observed that she has a hearing problem, which can become an obstacle to her learning at school. Strangely, she has a "handicap card" issued by the government specifying "mental handicap"! In Thailand this type of card gives the right to government aid, in the form of BHT 500.- (CHF 15.-) per month. Suda has never received a cent of this money: the bank account opened for her case is in her father's name and he has been taking the money for himself!

Suda tells us that she was seen by a doctor, but since she didn't understand the Thai language at the time, she was unable to express herself nor understand her own hearing problem. She received an incorrect diagnosis and was unjustly considered mentally

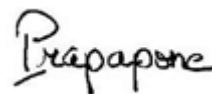
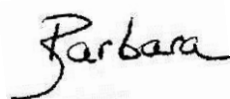
handicapped. She became the target of frequent mockery. A heavy burden for the little girl. Immediately, we took administrative steps and consulted a doctor, who indeed diagnosed a hearing deficiency without any mental problem. A request has been made to the government to obtain hearing aids free of cost. We had Suda's government subsidy card changed and we have opened a bank account in her name, so that the BHT 500.- actually get to her.

Due to her hearing problem, Suda must work hard in order to continue her secondary studies. Our encouragements and her teachers' extra academic support have paid off: Suda is gifted in Art and she was first among the students in 1st year at her school. Then she won first prize at a contest among several schools in Mae Sai, in northern Thailand! The next step will be a contest in Prayao among all the schools in northern Thailand: if she is among the top three, she will go to Bangkok for the national contest. To be continued...

Suda's story is among our "small successes" which bring us joy and give us strength and courage to continue our path. Unfortunately, Suda's story is only one of many. Most of the children have a tragic past, whether they have been left to fend for themselves, or their parents have died of illness or been imprisoned, or as happens all too often, they have lived in a world of unimaginable violence. Often it is when they reach adolescence that their childhood suffering re-emerges, requiring of us great patience, firmness and love.

Thanks to your very generous and constant support, miracles take place, lighting stars in Suda's eyes and of the children of the Sourire de Chiang Khong. We wish to express to you our gratitude from the bottom of our hearts.

With our warmest best wishes to all of you, dear foster parents and friends, for a beautiful Christmas and a very happy New Year 2015.



**"CHILDREN ARE THE WORLD'S MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE
AND ITS BEST HOPE FOR THE FUTURE." JOHN F. KENNEDY**