

**Barbara** Born and brought up in Geneva, she follows a commercial school and specializes in travel and hotel business. Her professional activities allow her to travel often and to discover the wider world. Despite enjoying her professional life, the question of the sense of her life is always present and at 27 years old, she takes the decision to donate her life during one year. She then leaves her family and country to work as a volunteer in the “Fountain of Life Center” in Pattaya in the southeast of Bangkok. This centre is dedicated for the children of the slums or prostituted. In order to give them a real children’s life, they receive a basic academic education, real meals, clothes, care and affection. The girls and boys who are obliged to be prostitutes find a haven of peace, a moment of respect, of dignity, as well as a possible training that will give them back some confidence. Barbara teaches French and spends hours, even nights some time, listening to “her students” telling stories, each more dramatic than the last. Despite the enormous effort put in with a program and insertion measures given by the Fountain of Life, she realizes that it is extremely difficult, close to impossible, to get these young persons out of their misery state. The only possible solution is to take the problem at its root, therefore to take these children in charge from their very early age, to make sure they follow school and to make them sensitive to the dangers of such a future.

**Prapapone** Born the same year as Barbara in the Northeast of Thailand, 6th of nine siblings, she chooses to become a teacher. She is hired by a private school and works there during several years. Married to a young Thai, she gives birth to a little girl, Whipada. She loses her husband in a dramatic motorbike accident – her life is shattered. One of her sisters working within the Fountain of Life Center in Pattaya suggests that she joins her whilst the baby stays with her parents in the Northeast. She finds her place as teacher while trying to find a solution for her new existence. That is when she meets Barbara and it is the beginning of a precious friendship that takes place. They will realize later that the two years spent by this man out of the ordinary was a perfect preparation for their future activity. Initiation to the customs of an *ethnie*, their traditions, important relationships with the chef and the authorities of the villages, the support to the Aids sufferers and to the children in the centre up to learning how to drive a pick-up in the mud!



## Together

Theoretically and as per the tradition of the older Thai families, Prapapone should have gone back to her parents. Too independent because of her life experience, she does not feel ready to take this step and decides to accompany



Barbara to Switzerland. Whilst they try to structure their humanitarian intention, a call for help arrives from one of Prapapone’s brothers. This missionary priest works in the region of Chiang Khong where he throws himself heart and soul for the Hmong community that live in a big poverty in villages and hamlets very difficult of access. He also runs a centre for people suffering of Aids, sends children to schools and helps sick people and their families. Without a possible solution, he requests the help of the two ladies who take on the challenge. They will realize later that the two years spent by this man out of the ordinary was a perfect preparation for their future activity. Initiation to the customs of an *ethnie*, their traditions, important relationships with the chef and the authorities of the villages, the support to the Aids sufferers and to the children in the centre up to learning how to drive a pick-up in the mud!

# LE SOURIRE DE CHIANG KHONG

After two years of quite intense “internship”, we felt like putting into practice our experiences in an independent way. The name of our work will be

## LE SOURIRE DE CHIANG KHONG

**1998**

Direct contact with several chiefs of villages, as well as Heads of government schools, helped us to move along rapidly with our project. These people made us aware of the first children that we welcomed to start our project. These children come from mountain tribes in China, Laos or even Myanmar, populations forgotten and ignored and whose fundamental rights are violated.

At the same time, the Association LE SOURIRE DE CHIANG KHONG is founded in Geneva – nine volunteers do a valuable and fruitful work to make our plans progress.

**1999**

The Foundation locates a large family house with an attractive rental rate in Ban Huai Sak, 30 km from Chiang Rai. We welcome the first 25 children and for whom we had to organise their identity papers in order to register them in the government school. We get acquainted with the famous school uniforms provided by the school that makes every child proud, with the bobbed hairstyle for the girls and the heads shaved for the boys. With fondness, we remember the little Naonsi, 6 years old, arriving from Laos, not knowing the language or the customs of her new homeland. Full of joy and happiness that she could go to school, she would not take off her uniform to go to bed!

**2000**

Our children in the home, all 37, now have a sponsor and we develop a program of remote sponsorship, meaning supporting a child who stays in his village, where there is a school structure. After a visit to the home, a young person from Valais (Switzerland) organises, in collaboration with the Economic Youth Chamber of Martigny, a gala dinner, with Jean-Marc Richard as host, in aid of the Sourire. Our courage is boosted!

**2001**

We see the opening of a second home 20 km away from Ban Huai Sak, in a big abandoned house. During the school holidays, a large number of our children spontaneously volunteered to make the house habitable and welcomes 15 children to begin with. Le Sourire also offers its help with the reconstruction of a school in a Lahu village and opens a day school, as well as a day nursery in Akha village.

Le Sourire is recognised as an NGO (non governmental organisation) in Thailand.

The team of “Temps Présent” from Swiss French Television, under the supervision of Claude Schauli, director and journalist, goes to the centre to prepare a documentary, the theme of which is “The Swiss Expatriates in the Humanitarian”. The film “Barbara with Open Arms” will be broadcast in December 2001.

Creation of our 1st Newsletter.

**2002**

Instead of going home to their respective families during the holidays, our adolescents prefer finding a summer job. All positions are examined carefully and controlled by us to avoid pitfalls. Most of the proprietors of selected establishments are very satisfied with the work of our youngsters and promise more job openings for the coming years. The director of the Amari Rincome Hotel in Chiang Mai, a Swiss citizen, proposes a one day introductory course to our youngsters and invites them to celebrate the 1st of August, Swiss National Day, with song and dance.

150 servicemen of the Thai Air Force visit the home! The villagers, rather sceptical towards us when we arrived in the region, seem to be slowly losing their suspicion; they smile at us and bring us food.

**2003**

Considering the increase in our work during the last five years, we are trying to raise funds to buy our own land, with the aim of the creation of a bigger centre. The positive evaluation by the State of Geneva of our association’s work (in Geneva) and the Foundation in Thailand enables us to get their support and acquire a piece of land in Ban Sarapi half-way between Chiang Rai and Thoeng.

Thailand grants the status of “Foundation” to the Sourire de Chiang Khong Foundation.

**2004**

We see the activation of a sponsorship program for children with parents suffering from Aids and the arrival of Kanjani and Ananya, orphans of the AIDS epidemic. They are fully taken care of by our foundation. Kanjani is currently studying law in the Chiang Rai University and Ananya, who is moving towards social work, has also been admitted to the University, two examples amongst the 11 orphans entrusted to the Sourire. Our institution also sponsors other children, who have lost their parents and are living with one or more family members.

Construction starts on the first building on our land. In April, 50 of our now 97 children being taken care



Akha traditional headdress



Teamwork

of, move into our new home to start their year in new schools. The structures are still very basic but use is possible with a scout's system!

Creation of our website [www.lesourire.ch](http://www.lesourire.ch)

**2005** Apart from our support to the ethnic minority groups in the area, we note that amongst the Thai population, extreme poverty has drastically increased in families. A whole generation is disseminated due to Aids, leaving children to their fate. We decide to offer our help to the largest number possible.

During the General Assembly of this year, the creation of a commission based in Valais was approved, a team who have been actively working for two years already, in close collaboration with AMAT Chantani method (sitting massage in Sion/Vevey).

The Thai Government awards Barbara with the prize of «Volunteer of the Year».

**2006** By now, all the children have arrived in the new home, which allows us to definitively leave our first nest in Ban Huai Sak. The change of schools, a real headache, is behind us. The schools, not being in close proximity to each other, lead us to have to consider a suitable means of transport – a school bus is offered to us by a Swiss foundation!

Development of the farm: acquisition of cows and buffalos, beginning of the pig and fish breeding. Amongst our small staff, we can count on Nasset, who was 13 years old when she joined the Sourire in 1998. At the end of her higher commercial education, she wished to spend one year in our centre as trainee.

**2007** A new documentary by Claude Schauli of Swiss French Television shows the evolution of the Sourire, which includes:

Development of a sports field, important for youngsters in parallel to their school activities and far from any urban area.

Construction of the first girls' dormitories.

Raising awareness, of problems linked to drugs and their consequences, collaborating with the Centre of the Aids victims in Chiang Khong.

**2008** The Sourire celebrates its 10th anniversary!

These 10 years would never have been possible without the faithful support and generosity of the sponsors, and all those who helped us to realise our various projects. During the anniversary evening event of the Sourire in Chouilly close to Geneva, Father Wirach Amonpattana, an active member of the foundation in Thailand, talks about an adventure trip where one has to find one's way through and keep walking!

This comparison reflects the achievements to date, because without knowing what tomorrow has in store for us, perseverance and confidence make us progress step by step

**2009** After 10 years of being operational, thanks to a program of individual sponsorships, we also introduce a collective program with the same conditions, which is very appreciated and relieves the bureaucratic burden, reducing administrative costs.

The boys will also now have their own dormitories! Construction begins on a library at the primary school in Ban Sanchoum.

The Prize Adèle Duttweiler 2009 (laudatio by Sir Jean Zermatten) is awarded to the Sourire.

**2010** During this year, heavy rains devastated Thailand with dramatic consequences. Even if we regularly suffer from violent storms, the home of the Sourire was saved thanks to the solid construction built on stilts. Nevertheless, our ponds overflowed and hundreds of fish were thrown out on to the banks.

It was necessary to save our food fast by cleaning, preparation and consumption! The flooded access road, heavily damaged, was repaired by our young «professionals»!



Entrance to the home area







Expanding the field of sports – basket-ball, volley-ball, takro

Mrs Christine Schraner-Burgener, Swiss Ambassador to Thailand visits our home. She has a particular interest in institutions that promote interactions between Switzerland and Thailand.

## 2011

Acquisition of new rice fields with the aim of food self-sufficiency.  
 Extension of our assistance and support to the schools attended by our 150 children remotely sponsored.  
 The terrible outbreak of drug trafficking and drug use in the villages prompts us to double the awareness of the dangers of this plague to our protégés.  
 Commemoration of the 80 years of friendship relations between Switzerland and Thailand. The Swiss Embassy organises a bazaar in our aid under the patronage of the Ambassador, Mrs Christine Schraner-Burgener.  
 Thanks to a students' marathon at the College of the Creusets in Sion (Valais), in aid of the Sourire, we can begin a new agricultural project, which is the plantation of 3500 rubber trees.

## 2012

Enlargement of the sports' field – basketball, volleyball and takro (team sport of southeast Asia).  
 Exceptional harvest of longanes (spherical fruit, similar to the Lychee), which are sold at the local village cooperative, with the profits going towards the maintenance of the fields.  
 All this managed by our youngsters, a natural way of learning the principles of economy!

## 2013

Good relationships with the village of Ban Sarapi where one of our staff members regularly participates in the village meetings, encourages solidarity that allows mutual trust to grow. Our home aims to be open and thereby gain the confidence and the

protection of the population. Also, a team amongst our adolescents participated in the rice fields' irrigation.  
 In Chiang Kian, a village close to the Sourire, in the Buddhist temple, a small, simple, aesthetic wall is constructed by our youngsters to separate the private area of the monks to the population. Our adolescents like to practice what they study in the professional school.

The traditional picnic organised during many years in Valais takes place for the first time in Lully close to Geneva..

## 2014

SCHOOL OF LIFE, based and built on the natural faculties of a human being. We realise each year a little more the validity of our pedagogy. So, regularly, residents of the Sourire enter the active life showing their sense of responsibility and their joie de vivre. Others choose the path of university such as Pi Aie who comes from a recomposed family of 10 children of whom she is the youngest!  
 Our young indigenous staff are not left out. There are internships and government training – drugs, Aids,



Development of the pedagogical agriculture project - A ton and a half of rice per month

social work, psychology, pedagogy of small children, etc.

In Sion, opening of «LA BOU-TIQUE» in aid of the Sourire and the association «Couleurs de Chine». Members of these two associations have put together and offer second hand clothing for sale with brisk sales throughout the year. This activity started in 2009 in a non-official way in private apartments. The schooling of the children is their primary objective.



Improvement of the irrigation system

## 2015

Another visit by the Swiss Ambassador to Thailand, Mrs Schraner-Burgener, with a delegation of the Embassy and a delegation of the IOM (International Organization for Migration). Development of our agricultural pedagogical project. At the moment, 75% of the rice consumed by the home comes from our rice fields. A quarter of our vegetables and a large quantity of our fruits come from our vegetable gardens and our orchards. Only the chicken is bought at the market.

Prapapone receives a license from the Social Work Professions Council (SWPC), an independent organisation issuing the social work regulations.

Release of the third film by Claude Schauli, "Les Enfants du Triangle d'Or" (the Children of the Golden Triangle) based on the Sourire de Chiang Khong.

## 2016

Preoccupied by the environment, we improve our water system. The supply of the rice fields from our ponds and the capture of the rainwater is a project inspired by the King himself. Participation of our children in a training and information day about the risks linked to earthquakes and to fires, organised by the Thai police. Montri and Lamyong, two of our residents who had left the foyer saw each other again, got married and came back to the Sourire with the desire to be part of our staff! With great pleasure, we hire them.

Barbara receives the Volunteer Prize 2016 from Northern Thailand and Chiang Rai.

The King Bhumibol, Rama IX, dies on October 13th at the age of 88 years old. A period of mourning of one year is decreed for this "Father of the Nation", we follow the governments instructions.

## 2017

Considering the high unemployment rate in the region and The Sourire being a Thai organisation, all the employees are local inhabitants. Most of the work is based on relationships of trust and continuity which enable us to connect with vulnerable families with the added advantage of speaking their language and knowing their culture. This was one of the reasons why it was never envisioned to realise a short-term

volunteer program. With the exception of the French scout movement who have been coming now for several years for a few weeks each summer to discover our activities and exchange mutual richness.

## 2018

Here we are 20 years later and we really wish to express our gratitude to the sponsors as well as to all the private donators, to the Town and State of Geneva, to a large number of communes in the Canton of Geneva, as well as to the towns of Sion and Sierre, to the numerous foundations that support us, to the associations and clubs that have organised events in sports, theatre, music or other, to the schools moved by children of another continent, for the charity evenings in our aid and for the kindness of many people who work humbly behind the scenes.



# CONCLUSION

## Education in two worlds that oppose each other

Quite a challenge! Accompany children of a poor and isolated origin to insert them in a contemporary world. The gap between the two worlds is huge. Even if these youngsters know perfectly well how to operate their iPhone, without going to school or following a professional training, without any education, there are dangerously exposed to a new form of slavery of the modern time.

By welcoming the children of tribes or also those of torn up Thai families to the Sourire, we strive to school them each according to their faculties in order to make sure that they will go the farthest possible. Each child is unique which requires a differentiating discernment. Often having experiences family dramas very young, they first need to be reassured, often take away any guilt feeling and well surrounded. Offer them a well balanced and harmonious surrounding is essential. Thereafter, we give a particular importance to the values of life to complete an education not only of knowledge but also of being. Often revolted, rebel, the juvenile provocations are present and at the same time they questions us as well as those who surround them and support them.

We progress and grow therefore together and if we try to give the maximum to your youngsters, we are widely rewarded by the richness and generosity of our protégés. The LOVE that never anyone finds the definition!

*Barbara Prapapone*



Gala evening  
20th anniversary  
September 22, 2018

Quick inscription desired, limited spaces.  
Information: Lisa de Beauregard.  
Phone 078 800 71 73



**LE SOURIRE DE CHIANG KHONG**

Warm thanks to the printing house Gessler SA, Sion and to the graphic artist Jeanclaude Warmbrodt