

LE SOURIRE DE CHIANG KHONG

A quarter of a century!

A year of volunteering in Pattaya, two other years in Chiang Khong (border town with Laos) motivated our minds to start the humanitarian adventure in favour of an exposed childhood. To do this, we chose the very poor region of northern Thailand with its various tribes lost in the mountains. Children with little schooling, often used in the fields, are deprived of a proper education and their naivety often leads them to dangerous and unhealthy paths.

To save children from a harmful destination, the Smile Foundation tries to gather as many as possible, in order to prepare them for a better future. They are welcomed into a family home, where they are educated, clothed, fed and housed. But not only that - the "School of Life" pedagogy has proved

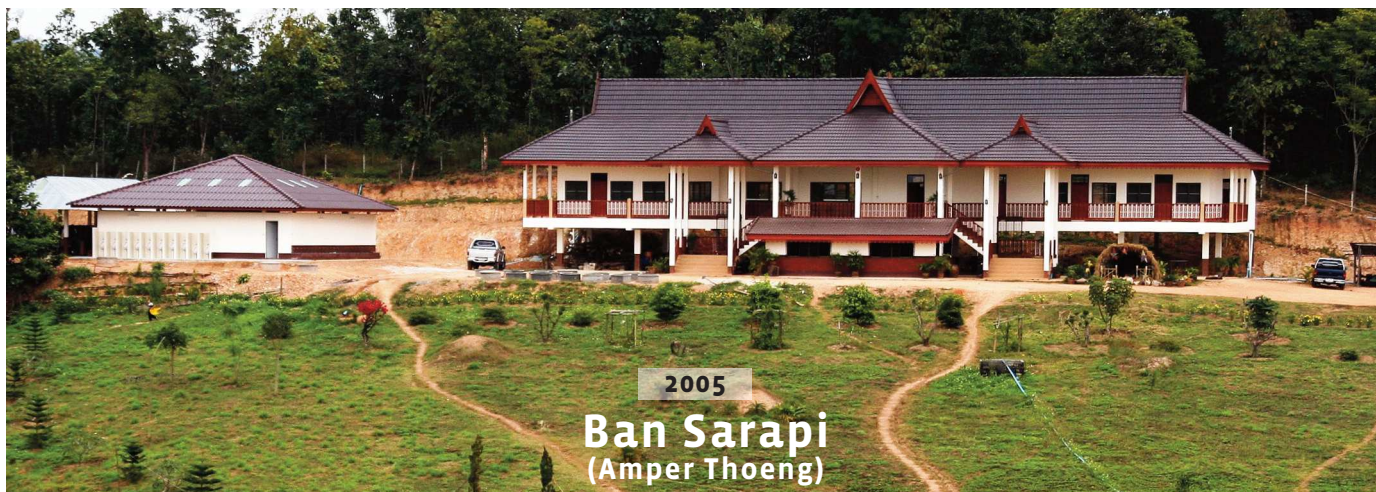


First logo - lifeboat from shore to shore - from darkness to light
Second logo - boat touching the saving shore

its worth - alongside school life, sports and cultural activities are organised. We base our educational approach on the strength of mutual aid, solidarity and the involvement of each individual for the collective good. Children are not assisted. Discovering their creative potential, one is there for the other and together we grow! Hundreds of children/young people have passed through "Le Sourire" - some for several years, others for less. One has gone on to a successful professional career, another has returned to his home region, but all are marked in one way or another by

their formative experience.

A drop in the ocean of human existence - but we dare to believe and hope that from ONE "big Smile" there will be many "little Smiles"





Cooking then and now!

In the early days of our life together, our meals were prepared as in the tribal villages, i.e. a fire under the roof, prepared from 4am so that the rice/vegetables were ready for breakfast - evening meal, same story!

However, the government precepts have forced us to follow the current rules and a large school kitchen has been created. Pii Lamdoiyane, who is in charge of the kitchen, had to do an apprenticeship to manage the new facility.



Towards independence

The constant increase of our rice fields is leading us more and more towards the independence of our needs. In addition to this, we are expanding our fruit fields, vegetable gardens and mushroom cultivation.



Agriculture project

Let's not forget our animals! Apart from the chicken we buy, the main meat comes from our pigs. Our cows and buffaloes require serious attention - our cow boys are proud of them! As cow meat is not much appreciated in our region, we regularly sell cows and buffaloes, a welcome benefit for maintenance.



Hay storage

Here is the protection of the hay before the two barns were built!



Fishing



Our various ponds not only irrigate part of our rice fields, but also allow a multitude of fish to live happily! But everything comes to an end - they end up on our children's plates! In the north/north-east, fish is the main dish of the inhabitants.



Calendar for a year

At the beginning of each school year (beginning of May) a calendar of occupation is established. For each task a group of children with a leader - the bigger one takes care of the smaller one. The team is rotated according to the season.



Sport

A large sports field is available to the young people - football, basquet and takrow (a popular sport in South Asia - similar to volleyball). Regular exchanges of matches with other foundations.





Maintenance and repair of buildings

Earthquakes in Thailand are common - our home is located on a major seismic fault and tremors are frequent. Every month a thorough tour of the buildings is carried out to identify any damage - immediate repair for safety and the protection of our children.



Strict annual government control for building safety - ultra precise control of the electrical/water system - control of vital applications in general.



Water towers



Several (how many?) water towers have been built according to the needs of each location, which due to earthquakes have to be systematically reviewed and repaired!



Recognitions

1998

The association was founded in 1998 in Geneva - all-volunteer committee

2001

The association is recognised as an NGO (non-governmental organisation) by the Thai Government

2001

Double Golden Médaille d'Excellence (santé & éducation) – Consertium International droits de l'homme – Victoria Hall Genève

2003

Foundation status in Thailand

2003

Gold plated plaque awarded by the Chiang Saen Government Education Department, honouring the Smiles of Chiang Khong for its support to Ban Rai School

2005

Volunteer of the Year Award for Barbara Gautschi from the Thai Government

2005

Good Citizen Award by Swisscom Zurich

2009

Adèle Duttweiler Prize by the Adèle Duttweiler Prize Foundation, Rueschlikon/Zurich

2017

"Volunteer of the Year 2016" award, Northern Region of Chiang Rai for Barbara Gautschi

Film/reportages TSR

(Claude Schauli, journalist/director)

"Barbara à bras ouverts" - TSR Temps présent 2001

"Le Sourire de Chiang Khong" - TSR reportage 2007

"Children of the Golden Triangle" - TSR reportage 2015





Schools
for children living in the hostel.

Primary schools in nearby villages - secondary school in Thoeng approx. 70 km from the hostel - universities Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Lampang, Prayao.

4-5 uniforms per student per school - compulsory - reason why large sections of the poor do not have access to schooling.

A large proportion of the children sponsored by Le Sourire live in their respective villages and attend local schools. Collaboration with the parents/families concerned, who organise regular meetings at home.

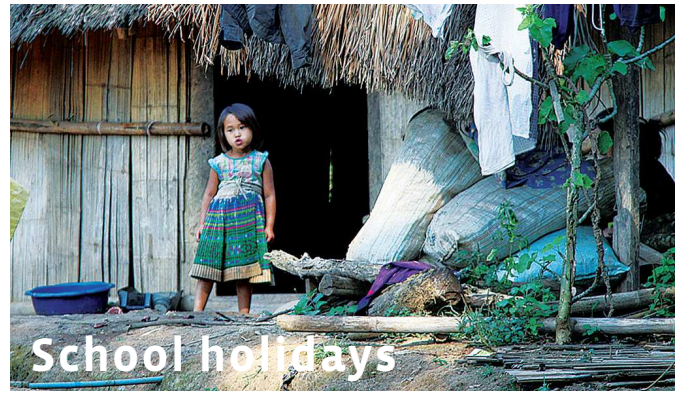
The children to be sent to school are recommended to us by the village chiefs/schoolmasters. These schools are rigorously followed by Prapapone/Barbara or by members of the staff.

Le Sourire's help often goes beyond school support to relieve the family's minimum needs.



Internet

Since schoolwork via the internet is compulsory, we were dependent on the nearest internet cafes in the early years. Thanks to the support of several donors, a well-equipped "internet room" was created. Economically more interesting and relieved to gather our young people in one place with supervision.



School holidays

Generally speaking, children return to their families/villages during the holidays. Until before the pandemic, teenagers tried to find a summer job in a shop/restaurant to earn some money. For the past three years, however, the job offers have disappeared - business is bad and unemployment is rising.



Their home

The children/young people take care of "THEIR home". Barbara and Prapapone base their pedagogical approach on the strength of mutual aid and the involvement of each person for the collective good. The home offers the children an education based on personal responsibility, solidarity and respect for cultures. Coming from the rural world, the young people are enthusiastically involved in agricultural work. Breeding and maintenance of animals (pigs, cows, buffaloes, dogs), fish farming, fields and rice paddies (fruit, maize and rice), gardening (vegetables) and general maintenance of the premises (interior and exterior).

While some of the young people aim for a future in a city such as BKK or Chiang Mai, a large proportion remain in their home area - and the maintenance of rural activities is highly valued by their families.

When they arrive at home, most of the children do not speak Thai, which becomes the compulsory language. However, in order not to lose their mother tongue, classes in Hmong and Akha are organised.

Free time is devoted to sports, drawing/painting, singing and dancing.





Family visit to the foyer

A special area is reserved for families to spend Sunday with their children.



Sustainable outreach

With joy and pride, the young people occasionally help the peasants of the neighbouring villages, participate in various official and religious festivals (Buddhist, animist, Christian).



Sponsorship programme

Sponsorships enable the schooling of children who are fed, housed and cared for in the home. When the family and school structure allows it, children can be sponsored while remaining in their village.



The continuous support of donations has enabled us to regularly expand the infrastructure of our home and covers the strictly controlled maintenance of the foundations. In addition to large donations from public bodies, foundations and companies, and private individuals, a large number of initiatives have been and are being taken on our behalf.

- Family celebrations - Christmas/birthdays - donations on the occasion of a death or a legacy
- Sport - running races by schools, clubs or individuals - golf tournaments and horse riding days
- Music evenings - gala evenings - art exhibitions/vernissages - theatre
- Charity days (massages)
- Yard sales and Christmas sales



Le Boutique

Fundraising in Sion for «Le Sourire de Chiang Khong»



2000

December - Jeune Chambre Economique de Martigny organises the first "Sourire" gala

2002

December - Christmas concert at the Basilica of Châlon (France)

2006

April - Support evening at the Hôtel des Vignes, Uvrier VS

2008

September - Gala evening for the 10th anniversary in Chouilly, GE

2009

February - "La Nuit des Neiges" Crans-Montana

2012

March - "Sourire en chanson" evening at Maison Provins, (espace Tourbillon), Sion

2018

September - 20 years anniversary - gala evening in Chavannes de Bogis VD

And the annual picnics in September either in VS or GE - friendly meeting of sponsors, donors and friends of Le Sourire.



Thai holidays

Songkran (Thai New Year) - 13-15 April - Water Festival

Loy Krathong November (date subject to change) - Festival of Lights

Children's Day in January
Day for the elderly in March
Mother's Day in August (birthday of the Queen Mother (wife of former King Rama IX))



Tribal villages

To find the villages of the various ethnic groups, you have to leave the main roads and take small paths that are often hidden and difficult to reach. And there, another world awaits us. Large families living in clans with a village chief. Their hut, often only one room, is used for cooking on a fire, eating on the ground and sleeping next to each other. The rest of their life is spent outside. The women/children in the fields, the men discussing 'business' while smoking 'their pipes'!



Schooling and additional support for villagers

If there is a school structure in one of the villages, we sponsor children from a distance to enable them to stay with their families. It is in this kind of village that Le Sourire has opened a nursery to take care of small children by two young girls. On the other hand, school meals, libraries and school material in general are financed. Le Sourire also helps VERY poor families who have one or more sponsored children.



Thai schools and villages

Over the years, we have come to understand that poverty also affects the Thai population and our support has expanded to include Thai families and schools. Sponsorships and various school needs.

Encounter

One exists only through the encounter (Abbé Pierre) - with the incessant risk of having made the right decision hour after hour, in which one constantly involves the "other".

Recognition

All good intentions put into action deserve recognition. Carried by energy, goodwill and courage, the resulting actions flow like a river of goodwill to the goal.

Thanks

It can be seen with clarity that the original idea of TWO people is sustained by a myriad of other intertwined encounters - by an army of known and unknown collaborators who are generous, noble and unselfish!

Thanks