

CONNECTING THE DOTS!

VISITING STUDENT EXPERIENCES LIFE AS A REFUGEE

Imagine living on 5 kg rice, 300 gm fermented fish, charcoal & one litre oil for a month? Then repeating this month after month after month? Well, this is what each registered refugee in a camp receives as their monthly ration.

We've read about the persecuted people who've fled their homes in Burma, persecuted by their government, brutalized by soldiers and now, "safely" located in 'refugee camps'. There are an estimated 162,000 refugees living in nine camps along the Thai-Burmese border with about 50,000 registered in the biggest Mae La camp. Insiders say that there are more than 10,000 more who are not registered.

Most of them are of the ethnic Karen tribe, who were once farmers who planted rice, vegetables or raised pigs, chicken and fish. Having had their homes burnt to the ground or family members killed, raped or taken away as child soldiers/slaves, they have fled their homeland & now live in these camps. They may be safe from the sudden attacks of the Burmese army but camp conditions are harsh. Camps are overcrowded and numbers are increasing daily. Frustration runs high with so many people together who are unable to go out or work legally.

What is life like? How do people cope? These are questions that one visiting volunteer had. When Em* – a Nicaraguan university student – came to us as a volunteer, he expressed just ONE wish. He wanted to work with refugees – but not just work with them, he wanted to live with them, to ex-



perience life as they did, to feel their pain, to understand their plight. In short, he hoped become one with them; a meaningful internship which would help him be more compassionate. However, in our work with the refugees, we have been kept on the outside because of legalities. No foreigner is allowed into the camps. We send supplies & assist with a bakery within the camp, but all through a Karen co-ordinator who lives in the camp .

As we knew that it would not be possible, we tried to persuade Em to work with the migrant communities – similar, but where people can work as lowly-paid laborers in construction work & on rubber plantations. Em amiably agreed to this second choice but the desire burning in his heart to live in a camp. We told him that unless God intervened with a miracle, there was no way to get into the camp as a special pass & authorization is needed. It was all now up to his faith, prayers – & a miracle! He left to visit friends in the north, intending to return to Bangkok, then to the south to work with the migrant communities. However, just before his return, he called to say that he wanted to go to Mae Sot to see if there was a chance. Seeing his determination, I called a friend there & told him of Em's desire to work in a camp somehow. This dear friend said he would take care of him. The next day, our friend said they'd met & he had arranged for him to go into the biggest Mae La camp. Em was elated.

He went off to his 'dream come true' – living in a refugee camp with a wafer-thin mattress on the floor for a bed, water trickling through a rusty pipe (more if there's rain) for showers, oven-hot classrooms and just two paltry meals a day. With only breakfast and dinner, Em felt the same hunger pangs as his students by the time the afternoon rolled around. With the heat beating down on the zinc

peek at life in Mae La camp



Huts in Mae La – home to more than 60,000 refugees



Refugees receiving their monthly rations



A typical wooden hut with a thatched leaf



Above: Water – hauled from one collection point to each home



Care for a shower? Picture taken in Em's bathroom.





Thanks to many caring corporate partners, we had a wonderful day celebrating the women & mothers at the Emergency Home (Bahn Chook Chern) in Don Muang with great entertainment, fun games, grand gifts and prizes and of course, a delicious array of snacks, food and drinks!

KPN Music Academy opened the program with Nork, the winner of KPN's 2009 singing contest. With her jovial charm & ease, she easily won the hearts of the audience, having a great rapport throughout the performance, to the point of getting the girls up to sing as well & dance along to the songs!

The following pictures & captions highlight the many individuals & companies who participated to make this event most memorable for all the women and children.

- We also appreciate the contributions from :
- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Chatchawarn R. | Sutisa Nontasila |
| Umarat Boonkerd | Mr. Hester Chew |
| Toshiba Storage Device | Mr. D. Morales |



Above: Ms Intrakul, MD of **Miracle Grand Hotel**, gives out gift bags of newborn supplies as well as cookie bags; Sunny hands out baby powder & lotion from **PZ Cussons**
 Cosmetic gift-bags from **International Beauty Products**
 Fashion accessories from **Hanako** ;
 Clothes, miscellaneous baby supplies from staff of **Giffarine (Navanakorn)** and **Ban Job Rak school/parents**;
 Body lotion from **Cute Press (Sakdhihornssup Foundation)**
 Nutty snacks from **Tong Garden**



Left: **Michel Potts**, American magician, impressed the audience with his bag of tricks ! Below: Looking over an inspirational magazine made just for them



Partnerin

Magical Makeovers



Hair stylists from **Cut & Curl Academy** , nail artist Jackie from **AJ's True Desire**, makeup artists from **Cute Press** . What a special treat — transforming each girl into a dream come true.



g to Pamper!

Food Fare!

Special Thanks for the yummy treats !!

Crema Ice-cream from **Chomthana Co.** ; Breakfast cereal, coffee & chocolate beverages from **Nestle Thailand**; Brownie cakes from **Secret Recipe**, cookie bags for all from **Miracle Grand Hotel**, Thai *somtam/kaiyang* from **Mitr Phol**, and Japanese o-bento lunch & drinks from **Oishi Group**.



For More information on our projects: Log on to: <http://www.familycare.org/network/central-thailand-mission/>

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Playing with mere imagination; working at age 8 is a reality for many children in this camp

on the zinc roofs of the school, he was not only hungry but tired & drenched in sweat by the time the afternoon classes started. But those circumstances did not deter him or dampen his enthusiasm to give, to add value to the lives of the students he was going to teach. He was going to give all he had – they wanted him to teach English. As a Nicaraguan, that is not a language he feels he can teach. But he jumped into it and did his best! They found out he's a top class Spanish dancer, so he ended up with extra classes teaching his students waltz, salsa and modern dance – all wonderfully timed for the upcoming talent show in the camp!

The pre-university students were enthralled with this young man's enthusiasm, positive spirit and cheerfulness. Em meanwhile, had to hide the pain he felt when he heard of students who had seen their family shot, of those who want to pursue their studies but won't ever have a chance; or those who've lived 20 years in that camp. Everyone had a story and though they stoically shared their hearts, he could sense their hurt and pain.

When he returned, he wrote in his reaction: "I feel so thankful to God because I have freedom, I have good living conditions such as a home, house, bed, water, food and some other things that refugees don't. I have had opportunities to pursue my studies in bachelor and master program, while refugees do not have this kind of opportunity. Now I have to share my blessings."

Indeed, Em meant what he said – he wanted to share his blessings. Empathising was not enough. Em returned and wanted to see how he could work to get more fans for the school; more food, more volunteer-teachers to help teach the students, more computers.... He has returned to Taiwan where he's studying for his Master's degree and while there, he's reaching out to sponsors and friends to see how he can raise funds to help improve the lives of those in the Mae La camp school where he lived as a refugee student.

If just one volunteer can give so much and affect the lives of another 50 young people in such an uplifting way, think how we can enthuse 500 or eventually 50,000? They may not have much in the physical but if we can enthuse them with hope, with love, and encouragement, we have begun a silent revolution amongst the young people, the leaders of the future who will face hardships head on with a positive, overcoming spirit that says "I CAN do it!" and with that, anything is possible.

We are now trying to co-ordinate with a network of people as well as corporate partners to try to do more to help this school and those who have the ability to effect change and make that difference in the lives of these people. If you would like to help in some way, please let us know!

*Em – name changed for his security

Upcoming Projects

Christmas and the New Year will soon be rolling in. We will be engaged in many projects including providing needed supplies especially when Thailand's cold spell comes in Dec./Jan) Every year, there's always an appeal for warm clothes, warm beverages and blankets by those in the camps. We also hope to provide supplies & visits to the Foundation for Women (set up to help women & their children – victims of traumatic human trafficking; as well as the Pakred home for the disabled (CCD) run by a small team of volunteers who are dedicated to helping mentally /physically challenged children who have been orphaned or abandoned, to attain progress & independence in their lives. Then there will be visits to cheer up those in hospitals, the orphanage, the Shelter & performances by the orphans & our teens at hotels . YOU can be a part! – call us if you can help by donating goods, funds or services or your time & energy! "Individually, we're one drop, Together we're an ocean"- Japanese proverb. Let's work together to have a wonderful wave of love & share the joy this Christmas!

You can also help by buying beautiful 2011 calendars (see below) for your friends and clients!



Available in English and Thai. Contact us with your orders today!

In appreciation

Providing services for others as well as maintaining a center for our families and volunteer staff entails operating costs & basic living expenses. To this end, we are thankful for the following friends who support us in this way.

- Angie Watt
- Bouygues-Thai
- Fast Cheetahs (S'pore) – printers
- Golden Foods Siam
- H. Chew
- Kerry Flour Mills
- Orchid Diamond Polishing Works
- Patum Rice Mill & Granary
- Mah Boonkrong Dairy Goats Co.
- G. Wong & Manica-Thai
- Kamthorn, Surachet & Somsak
- Toshiba Storage Device (Thailand) Co.
- Tong Garden

Making a Difference

Central Thailand Mission is one of the selected humanitarian aid projects working in partnership with the American human service agency – *Family Care Foundation* – which is an American, tax-exempt, non-profit, IRS-approved 501 (c)(3) public charity.

Based in Bangkok for the last 20 years, CTM works to help the disadvantaged in many ways.

- ♥ Being the bridge between people with the needs & those with the resources
- ♥ Supply of basic essentials of food, water, clothes as well for destitute communities
- ♥ Initiating the sponsorship of major needs & projects eg. Building a water supply for a school, education seminars & AV materials for schools
- ♥ Counseling & Encouragement for the handicapped, the terminally-ill (death coaching/grief counseling), AIDs patients, abused women & children
- ♥ Services include: preparing orphans for adoption, laughing yoga at hospitals, therapy for abused women & teens
- ♥ Providing assistance to international volunteers who want to give of their time, talents or resources to help others.
- ♥ Giving God's love, spiritual strength & comfort to those who need & seek a purpose & direction for a meaningful life.

Central Thailand Mission is a non-profit volunteer organization. ALL projects & activities are possible through contributions from corporate partners as well as caring individuals. Please contact us if you want to participate or sponsor the work we do.

CONTACT US:

Email: centhai@gmail.com
Cell: 081-6971409
Tel/fax: 02-5109079