



HEALTH AND EDUCATION FOR CHANGE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: CHILD'S DREAM UNLOCKS THE POWER OF YOUTH

FOR MORE THAN TWO DECADES, CHILD'S DREAM HAS USED EDUCATION, SKILLS TRAINING, AND ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AS TOOLS TO ENABLE YOUNG PEOPLE FROM MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES TO LIVE SUCCESSFUL, PRODUCTIVE LIVES AND TO BECOME PART OF A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS. HEADQUARTERED IN THAILAND AND WORKING ACROSS THE MEKONG SUB-REGION—CAMBODIA, LAOS, MYANMAR, AND THAILAND—CHILD'S DREAM IS ON A MISSION TO REDUCE INEQUALITY, EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE, AND BUILD HEALTHIER, FAIRER AND MORE JUST SOCIETIES.

Child's Dream founders Marc Thomas Jenni and Daniel Marco Siegfried have an unusual goal: to put themselves out of business. For now, however, Child's Dream initiatives to support access to essential health care, quality education, and skills development for young people in Southeast Asia remain essential. The COVID pandemic and the military takeover in Myanmar

pushed millions of vulnerable and marginalized people back into poverty.

Nevertheless, the progress Child's Dream has made so far—evolving from a two-person team into an organization with an impact on more than 1.2 million lives—gives them hope that the countries in which they



work will one day be home to thriving, self-sustaining communities that no longer need organizations such as theirs.

CAREER BREAK TO CHANGE LIVES

Making a transition from the world of high finance to a career in the nonprofit sector working with people living on or below the poverty line is not something many would take on. This, however, is just what Jenni and Siegfried did when, in 2003, they left successful careers in banking to create a charity to change children's lives for the better.

Jenni and Siegfried were working as senior directors in a global financial institution when they decided that using money simply to make more was not how they wanted to spend the rest of their lives. It was a conclusion they both reached independently. For Siegfried, being promoted to senior management, making him the bank's youngest director worldwide,

was what prompted a moment of soul searching. Meanwhile, Jenni, a senior director at the same bank, had resigned and was thinking about taking a career break to reflect on what he wanted to do next.

That was when he got a call from Siegfried, who had started volunteering in Chiang Mai, a large city in the north of Thailand. Siegfried told Jenni he had an important idea and asked him to come to Chiang Mai to discuss it. Jenni was surprised when Siegfried suggested they join the development sector by starting a charity together. "I have a master's in finance, and he's a chartered financial analyst. We had nothing in common with this industry," says Jenni. "I told him: 'You must be totally nuts.'"

HOLISTIC APPROACH TO IMPACT

Since its founding over twenty years ago, Child's Dream has grown to include 80 staff and operations throughout Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand.

Its work spans from building schools and other educational infrastructure to launching scholarship programs and medical funds. And in a 2022 milestone, more than a million beneficiaries had been reached directly through its programs and initiatives.

The impact of these programs and initiatives has been tangible, says Jenni. “We’ve seen tremendous progress at the educational level in the countries we work in,” he explains. “When we started in those countries, only 30 percent of primary school-age children went to school. Twenty years later, at the province level, we’re at nearly 100 percent enrolment at primary school level.”

“WHEN WE LOOK AT UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS—THOSE ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WILL SNOWBALL THEIR KNOWLEDGE INTO CIVIL SOCIETY, AND THEY ARE ULTIMATELY GOING TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE IN THEIR COUNTRIES.”

MARC THOMAS JENNI

Jenni believes the key to social impact success is a holistic approach to problem-solving. For Child’s Dream, this means breaking down the obstacles preventing children from going to school and remaining in education. These might be economic, logistical, or language barriers. They might lack access to high-quality educational materials or training for teachers and school administrators. Meanwhile, a critical part of the team’s work is supporting access to healthcare and providing emergency humanitarian relief.

Beyond these forms of support, Child’s Dream also helps build young people’s employability through skills training and youth development. This is where Jenni sees the real potential for positive impact. “Building schools is what people understand best, but that’s only 30 percent of our intervention,” he says. “When we look at triggering change, our flagship interventions are our leadership and empowerment programs and our university scholarships.”

ADAPTABLE AND NIMBLE ORGANIZATION

Jenni’s initial reaction to the idea of former bankers starting a development organization might have been that it was madness. Still, he now realizes that a lot of Child’s Dream’s success is due to him and his co-founder coming from the business world. This meant they understood how to run complex organizations. “It’s something a lot of NGOs struggle with,” Jenni points out. “They know how to address the needs



of beneficiaries, but they don't always know how to build a structure or how to have standard operating procedures. That has been one of our strengths." Child's Dream has also been highly strategic in selecting the places where it delivers its services. "We have picked provinces where few other NGOs are doing the same thing," says Jenni. "We don't need to go to provinces where there is already an abundance of NGOs. That would not make sense for us."

"I HAVE A STRONG BELIEF THAT THE ONE THING NO ONE CAN TAKE AWAY FROM YOU IS EDUCATION. WHAT YOU PUT INTO YOUR BRAIN WILL ALWAYS BE THERE."
MARC THOMAS JENNI

The organization is now in what Jenni calls the "growing up phase," focusing on building its organizational capacity and developing tools to plan, manage, and review its programs and those of its NGO partners. An essential part of this is continuous monitoring and measurement to ensure its work has the right impact. Meanwhile, the American Friends Fund of Child's Dream hosted at Myriad USA provides a cost-effective and flexible solution to receive support from U.S. donors for the organization's continued development.

FINDING HOPE AMID HARDSHIP

The success of Child's Dream has not come without challenges and the need to change course. In 2008 and 2009, for example, it went through a significant restructuring. With the organization's staff and levels

of funding growing rapidly, it needed to create a middle management level, which meant promoting and training some of its most experienced employees so that they could lead three units focused on health, basic education, and higher education.

More recently, the challenges have been external. The military takeover in Myanmar forced Child's Dream to close its office in Yangon. "The Myanmar military coup is a brutal situation," explains Jenni. "We had to evacuate our entire team to Thailand." It also created a need to develop educational programs in Thailand for migrants and refugees from Myanmar.

None of this has been easy. However, Jenni says that, when times are tough, he derives his strength from the people Child's Dream is helping. "I see the hunger for education in young people," he says. "And they are not giving up. The more hardships they face, the more they want to achieve something. I find this extremely inspiring."

<https://childsdream.org/>

<https://www.every.org/childsdreamfoundation>

Myriad USA facilitates thoughtful, effective giving across borders.

Myriad USA is the new name for the King Baudouin Foundation United States (KBFUS). We bring together the expertise of KBFUS and Give2Asia, and provide donors with a simple and efficient platform to support their favorite nonprofit initiatives overseas, anywhere around the world.

To learn more about our Donor advised funds, Legacy funds, and Myriad ART, visit myriadusa.org or contact us at (212) 713-7660 or info@myriadusa.org.