



Annual Review 2009

In a recent article, The Spiegel magazine said that “the economical downturn had made the world poorer but not more prudent”. There is hardly any silver lining at the end of the horizon when the banking industry is ready to fall back into old bad habits. Just the same could be said about the world recovering from the worst times of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Did the world become more prudent and did it learn? As soon as there was news of better medical therapies, risky behaviors became apparent once again and infection rates started to increase in many cities.

In General

Baan Gerda has existed now for 10 years. If we are asked to classify the children’s time in different phases then it would be something like this:

- Phase 1 the time of struggle to survive
- Phase 2 the time of growing and thriving
- Phase 3 re-integration into ‘normal’ society

Phase 1 is under control and partly history. It happens only rarely that our children have to be treated in hospital. They are now almost as strong as non-infected children. The analysis of their blood reflects normal immune values.

The Boy Nui

Still, there are children who are who are a source of grave concern. When Nui was brought to Baan Gerda he was already in the advanced stages of AIDS. There was

little hope that he would survive. We became more optimistic when his body started to tolerate the aggressive ARV (anti retro viral) medicine and he was able to walk a little without the support of his new brothers and sisters. Nui died suddenly and unexpectedly when everybody in Baan Gerda was having dinner in the main Kinderstern hall.

In recent years, death has been a rare visitor in Baan Gerda and the loss of Nui was hard for us to accept. We told the other kids that the cause of Nui's death was not HIV related and they should not worry that something similar could happen to them. He would most likely still be living if treatment had been administered earlier.

The Baby Tavid

Tavid's situation was similarly desperate when he joined the Baan Gerda community. His mother had fled from Myanmar to a small boarder village after her husband had died of AIDS. She crossed the border illegally with her three year old daughter and her new born son, Tavid. He was sick with AIDS already when he was born. Not being a Thai citizen he was not entitled to proper treatment. He eventually arrived in Baan Gerda and was transferred to the ICU of a Bangkok hospital. After staying in the hospital for 2 months, Tavid was then strong enough to be integrated into life in Baan Gerda. For many months however, the weight of Tavid was scarcely more than that of a newly born baby. Now he has put on much weight and he is becoming a 'normal' baby. When we get official permission for his mother to travel, she will come to Baan Gerda and the family can be reunited again.

Talents and Education

With the help and assessment of teachers, foster parents, Baan Gerda management and the children themselves, we are establishing profiles of our older children which will facilitate their choice of profession. We are especially interested in the assessment of the school teachers who know that we attach great importance to their judgment. We will have to live with the fact that some of the children have no ambition to finish school successfully.

Choice of Profession

The provincial capital Lopburi is 80 km from Baan Gerda and can be reached by bus. The more gifted children will be able to attend the university in that city whilst they continue to live in BG.

Other children need to receive a vocational training. There are suitable training centers run by the government. BMW have also offered us ten apprenticeship places in their assembling works.

We are in contact with an institution run by the University of Khon Kaen which is teaching biological farming. One branch of this institution is in the vicinity of Baan Gerda and accessible by bus connection. There is a vast educational program offered by this institution. We will come back to this issue in a separate letter.

We now have now a rough guideline how the professional future of our children might look.

Activities

“A Boy and a Tiger” - Baan Gerda performs a children’s opera

These are the comments of the German Ambassador following a preview several months ago;

“On March 20th the children of Baan Gerda performed excerpts of the opera “A Boy and a Tiger” in the residence of the German embassy in Bangkok. With the help of their musical teacher and composer of the opera, Bruce Gaston, the children performed an inspiring piece of music. The tiger, which has the special attention of the boy Pi, has a special significance for the opera’s participants - most of the kids are infected with the HIV virus so all of the children carry their own personal tiger which they have to relate to”

With a great deal of acting competence and musical ability, the young artists managed to fascinate the audience. Also, the stage design caught the attention. At the end of the performance everybody agreed it was a very successful evening.

Midnight Run

The annual Midnight Run, organized by the Amari Watergate Hotel, took place in the streets of Bangkok in October. The target was to run 6 or 12 km on the humid hot streets in the shortest possible time. 5000 runners from all over the country had registered for the run.

The kids of Baan Gerda were also courageous enough to participate. 30 of them not only started the race, but finished it in remarkably fast times. They were proud to be presented with medals for their achievement.

What growing children should know

Our oldest children are growing up and reaching a ‘critical age’. As a part of a sexual education program, there are teams of professional teachers consisting of psychologists and social workers to give the children guidelines in relevant matters. In this program, special importance is attached to the extra responsibility due to their HIV situation. One day they will be members of the society outside of Baan Gerda and they need to be prepared to follow special rules.

Our Vision

When the time is right we want our children to return their communities. It is the place where many years ago they were forced to leave, when HIV/AIDS was the source of horror. At the time, villagers did not know anything about AIDS other than it was incurable and certainly fatal.

New medicine and educational campaigns turned the situation around. Still, we are afraid that there will be always be a stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. It is therefore important that

the children receive an excellent education and are well prepared to become a valuable member of society.

Often we are asked at what age the children will leave the protection of Baan Gerda. Almost all of them do not know any other home than Baan Gerda so it will continue to be the place of retreat when there is the need for it. We will do everything in our power to ensure that they will be able to stand on their own two feet and brave the imponderables of future life.

Our warm thanks for supporting life and wellbeing in our village.

All of us, children and adults, send you warm wishes for a happy and blessed Christmas holiday and good fortune for the coming year.

The Children's Rights Foundation
- Baan Gerda -

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