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## **ICEA MISSION STATEMENT**

The Mission of ICEA is to promote community education as “the process that enables communities to take control of their own development and enrichment through lifelong learning. It energises people and utilises public, private and voluntary resources to build and enhance communities through the identification and meeting of community needs. It empowers people to make community decisions and to take community action.”

“We should not accept the world the way it is; we have to be different to create something different in this world.”

**Paulo Freire, 1921—1997**

## **THAILAND: CONCEPT SCHOOL FOR LIFE -A PROJECT FOR AIDS ORPHANS AND CHILDREN OF POVERTY**

by Juergen Zimmer, Past President of ICEA

### **1. THE SITUATION**

More than 2000 children worldwide are infected with AIDS every day. Four million children have already died of AIDS. The total number of AIDS orphans is estimated at 13.2 million.

The AIDS epidemic tore through the villages of northern Thailand like the plague. These villages are like an entry port to death: parents lie dead or dying. Old people, relatives or neighbors try to help the children left behind as well as they can. Surviving children are unable to understand or process this dying. Unlike the plague era in Europe, death does not hurry through the country in a rushed march; instead, it is a process of saying good-bye that lasts a very long time.

Fleeing, like the characters in Boccaccio's novels who left the plague-infested cities for the country, is impossible. This epidemic spreads unnoticeably at first. Chains of infection may go undetected for many years, as most people only go for an examination when AIDS breaks out and the last phase of the illness becomes apparent with its visible symptoms. Patients know that the medical staff does not keep their collective mouth shut: News of their illness is quickly spread in the village, and the patients suffer discrimination. Even AIDS orphans are not examined for fear on the part of their relatives that they encounter further trauma, and because they do not want to accept the possibility that the children could also be infected. Examining the children does not even make much sense as long as access to medication that could lengthen their lives is blocked. The AIDS patients only receive the medication that they can afford – which in these cases isn't even palliative medicine, but at best "Jack-of-all-trades" pills and tablets. The rich share the effective, life-saving medications with each other and no further.

The overwhelming majority of AIDS orphans live on the economic periphery of this world in extremely difficult conditions. There is no easy path to help them. But we can forge small paths and find models that can be invented from our experiences and be applied to other settings, not models created for a unique case, but rather are prototypes with multiple characteristics.

This project, the *School for Life* for the children of Pongkum, will open such a path.

### **2. LOCATIONS OF THE PROJECT**

*The village Pongkum in northern Thailand*

The village Pongkum is composed of several hamlets and one main center and is located an hour northeast of Chiang Mai in the mountains near Dri Sathep. About 20 percent of the 170 children in the small elementary school here are AIDS orphans or are, for other reasons, not cared for adequately. Many families live hand-to-mouth, use the woods as their supermarket, or purchase a small plot of land for their own use. According to the mayor, many of the poor residents here are excluded from circulation of money. The orphaned children are supported by the government and receive 6 Bath per day, which is approximately 14 cents. The school teachers try to provide lunch for the children with these means. The amount is not enough to live on, yet too much to die.

### **Joy's Farm**

Joy's Farm is approximately 4 kilometers from Pongkum and lies on volcanic ground. It is surrounded by thick woods, a royal forest belonging to Thailand's king, and is dedicated to developing organic farming. The farm has provided a large area for the project. A small traditional "village", a children's farm, will give children in need educational opportunities and a life worth living.

### **Joy's House**

The farm belongs to Joy's House. Joy's House is a family business in Chiang Mai led by Neen "Joy" Worrawittayakurn. Joy's House encourages culture sensitive tourism: Joy's House opens doors into Thai daily life that bring guests and local residents together as active partners and friends. Some guests do not only want to observe, they prefer to actively participate in what they see. More than a few of them want to leave tracks behind. For this reason, Joy's House combines investigating reality with the opportunity to make contributions towards the development of the community. Guests are not treated like "black boxes", but as experts with professional experience. The guests do not have to take on this role, of course. They can also choose to simply take vacation while they are there. But they know that the invitation to actively participate – regardless of how small or large their contribution is – stands.

Joy's House was voted one of the best seven projects world-wide for socially responsible tourism at the International Tourism Fair (Berlin) in March 2002. In November 2002, it received the "Outstanding of Travel and Service 2002 Award" from Thailand's government as one of the best travel destinations in the country.

## **3. GUIDELINES**

Analyses of the village Pongkum and studies of the psychosocial and economical situation of AIDS orphans and other children in situations of extreme need were conducted in the time leading up to the project. The following guidelines were crystallized from these studies:

Securing the children's existence and a life worth living is the central objective. The trauma the surviving children have experienced requires a setting that can encourage therapeutic qualities, and that can provide reliability and a second home. Another goal of the project is to make life-saving medications affordable.

The project relies on close cooperation between the elementary school, the village and the farm. The children should not lose their social ties, they should strengthen them in an environment in which they are comfortable. Pongkum and the farm form a network of lively connections that includes relatives, friends, schoolmates and neighbors.\*

Children who, for valid reasons, cannot live in the village are housed on the farm. They attend the elementary school in the village or, later, the nearest secondary school.

The farm's pedagogical offerings complement those of the school. Children with more special needs are kept in view, but they should not be isolated. For this reason, the farm's activities are almost always also open to other children, for example, in the form of weekend camps.

The village school is involved in the pedagogical developments to avoid two completely different learning cultures from arising.

Guests are welcome. They can visit the project and, if they are motivated to do so, can participate in different forms – as experts, sponsors or friends.

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\* A problem recognized by the SOS Children's Villages is that many of the youth who have to leave the villages at some point do not know where they belong: They are neither anchored in the region (as the villages are often not located in the regions where they are from or are not connected closely enough with the local community), nor are they world citizens.

#### **4. CHARACTERISTICS**

With the Education Act of 1999, Thailand's government opened the doors to reforming their education system. Instruction should be more oriented towards the pupils and towards their daily lives. Solving problems that are closely connected to the pupils' reality is in the forefront of learning.

##### **Landing on one's own feet**

Thailand's National Education Commission has ideas for vocational training schools that are significantly further than we find in the current international discussion regarding education. The vocational schools should be developed into "entrepreneurial schools", and the graduates will be equipped with double qualifications: The ability, as an employee, to work as part of a team, yet possessing skills as an "innovative entrepreneur" to create jobs. The pilot study "The Development of Entrepreneurial Schools in Thailand" (Zimmer/Puntasen/Suksirikul / Wawsri 2001) shapes the project planned here.

The goal: Educate pupils to develop their entrepreneurial spirit. An innovative entrepreneur is a person without particular resources who plays with an entrepreneurial idea and carries it out on the marketplace. His best capital is a good idea that contributes to an improvement in the quality of living. This unique entrepreneur acts socially and ecologically responsibly and is successful without plundering resources. The résumés of people who have taken the plunge into running their own businesses have some characteristics in common: They were already developing entrepreneurial initiatives during their childhood, and they usually had difficulties with conventional schools. The project *School for Life*, the children's farm, wants to create a setting that encourages children and youth to develop and attempt entrepreneurial ideas in a playful setting and without the pressure of starting a business. In this manner, children and youth prepare themselves for situations later in which it will be important to create employment positions for themselves and for others (instead of chasing after positions that are not available) to enable them to break through the circle of poverty. Entrepreneurship education does not mean encouraging children and youth to jump head first into a rapidly spinning consumer spiral, it means educating children and youth in intelligent humility with the goal of attaining a higher quality of life while using fewer resources.

##### **Discovery learning**

Children, when they are not hindered, actively steer their own learning processes. They are curious, motivated, learn through trial and error, prefer a connection between "theory" and "practice" and opportunities for "learning by doing". The children's farm can act as a basis station for discovery voyages à la Jules Verne. Gaining knowledge, skills and abilities serves the continuation of the children's projects. The pedagogues no longer function as lion tamers who try to get the entire class to jump through a hoop, they act more as stimulators, developmental advisors, and assistants in the research and discovery voyages.

##### **Community development**

Community education means "learning in, with and for the community". Learning is considered participation in lasting developments in the community. Community schools open themselves from the inside and the outside and participate in developing and shaping the community. The children's farm and Joy's Farm, the village school and the village of Pongkum create a network that serves such developments on a small scale. Examples of this include: The farm creates jobs for people in the village and teaches them competencies in the area of organic farming. Guests from Joy's House help the village school develop a recycling center, where garbage from the village can be recycled; the children become managers and experts in recycling. The school often feeds the orphaned children; through

charity rallies, which are partially planned by the children, guests can improve the means with which the children are cared for.

## **5. LEARNING AREAS**

The intent of getting away from an orientation around school subjects and referencing the school curriculum more towards key problems and key situations does not mean giving up academic knowledge as useless. It means focusing knowledge from various subjects on real-life problems and applying the knowledge to solutions to the problems. A convenient place for this is a small Center of Excellence, a space where reflecting and acting can be combined, a laboratory for in-depth, practical studies. These blocks should reflect important local and regional themes.

Curriculum development within the project means examining the state curriculum used in Pongkum's school for its use in such Centres of Excellence, and for how it could be put into a meaningful context. The state's curriculum is not questioned, it is merely organized differently and expanded upon based on experience.

The following learning areas are currently planned.

### **Organic farming**

This laboratory will serve experimental research in possibilities for organic farming. Studies on growing agricultural products without using chemicals can be conducted here. Useful and damaging insects in agriculture can be a topic, or the process of reintroducing threatened types of butterflies and birds back into the area can be covered. The farm is a learning-intensive setting that combines ecology and economy – besides creating products, the goal is also to sell the products, to find niches in the marketplace in an environment dominated by chemically-dependant agricultural businesses.

### **Tourism**

Career options for the youth include working in the area of culture sensitive tourism. Children can learn to blaze trails in the woods from early on: herbal-remedy trails, wild fruit and vegetable trails, insect trails, or colors of nature trails. They get to know the woods as a supermarket from which they can take many things they need for their lives, and which must be managed in such a manner that it lasts. The children and youth can take guests on "soul trekking" tours. They get to know their region, the villages, the markets, the hot springs, the natural and cultural landscape, and let the guests share in this.

### **Nutrition**

This learning area could include a bistro on the farm with youths as cooks and experts in northern Thai specialties. Other people have had experience in this: In the 1980's, "Hapag Kalinga" was founded in Manila, a restaurant for the upper-middle class with dishes from different regions in the Philippines. Street children ran "Hapag Kalinga" and were assisted by adults. School instruction included the things they had to learn to buy good products at low prices at a wholesale market, to cook very well, to provide friendly service, to calculate, to advertise, and to maintain the restaurant's standards of quality. The guests – from President Aquino to casual customers – admired the children's professional work and their wild charm. In the bistro in the *School for Life*, guests can not only look over the young cooks' shoulders, they can also contribute their own recipes from their far-off home lands.

### **Body & Soul**

Supporting psychosocial and physical development is considered an integrated process. Curricular elements pertaining to health and sport didactic combine with psychological-

therapeutic elements. A *spa* as a learning area can combine Thai-Buddhist traditions with modern knowledge about body treatment. A *children's circus* as a learning area can combine the enjoyment of acrobatics with entrepreneurship.

### **Culture & Development**

Northern Thailand's dance and music can be sustained, and artistic craftwork trained. At the same time, new things can arise through intercultural encounters. Workshops with native artists and international guests that include children and youth encourage them to make their own products, as well. Anything from an inter-ethnic jam session with bamboo saxophonists and folk musicians to developing ethnic fashion for children: Approaches can already be found that show the way.

The children are deeply rooted in Buddhism. At the same time, they encounter values that also are part of other religions: Respect for life, providing for the needy, the worth of a human, loving nature.

### **Applied natural sciences**

The laboratory equips children with practical knowledge for their projects and, at the same time, sends them traveling through time in the history of scientific experiments and discoveries. How did people in the stone age use tools? How did people in the middle ages use the laws of gravity? How can a water wheel be built, and how does a dynamo work? Why do plants need light? How can solar collectors be built? Children are inventors who become alchemists and want to discover the philosopher's stone.

### **Communication**

The children grow up bi-lingually and learn the Thai and the English languages. Adults will communicate in either Thai or English, according to immersion methods. The school teachers also profit from English on the farm: They want to learn English themselves to teach it.

Communication also occurs via the internet. Interactive software makes the children familiar with the computer. They learn to write correspondence over e-mail and to find access to knowledge.

### **International education**

The United Nations has developed a curriculum called "Global Concerns and the United Nations" that demonstrates the relationship between "global and local concerns" in a plausible way and creates local opportunities for action. This curriculum can be part of an international and intercultural education that helps children determine their position in the world, and at the same time, understand that we all live in the same world.

### **Building and living**

The children are involved in planning and developing the small village on the farm. The village is grouped in a round shape that functions as a market and as a meeting place. Besides the laboratories and learning and activity areas, the village will also have living areas for the children who cannot live in the Pongkum village or elsewhere. The architecture utilizes traditional knowledge about using natural materials. Wind provides cooling; water must be drawn from the depths of the volcanic ground.

## **6. STEPS**

### **History of the idea**

The idea for this initiative of helping children in especially difficult situations originated with Gisela Zimmer. Gisela Zimmer, who lived in Lindau on Lake Constance in Germany at the time, became ill with leukemia in 1998 at the age of 85 and prepared a solidarity concert for children in Kosovo with the help of other residents of Lindau. The concert was held on the day of her burial in June 1999 in one of Lindau's city churches with approximately 100 musicians and 1000 guests. The concert-goers contributed a total of 10,000 Euro in donations; attempts to put the funds to meaningful use in Kosovo were abandoned in light of the flow of money into the country that already existed. The family agreed to use the money to bring a project for AIDS orphans in northern Thailand to life.

### **Mentorship and administration**

The project is mentored by the International Academy (INAgGmbH) at the Free University of Berlin, in conjunction with Joy's House International. Financial administration occurs through INA. Researchers from the Thammasat University in Bangkok have taken on an advisory role.

### **Steps taken**

The projects began in the year 2000 with the following steps:

Three charity rallies were held at Joy's House with Thai and international guests. Two of these rallies occurred in close conjunction with the Pongkum village. The funds raised here were used to provide for the children.

20 Students from the Free University of Berlin and other volunteers from various countries taught English in Pongkum's school and developed projects with the children.

Camps were and will be held on the farm for the children. The topics included language and environmental education.

The living conditions of the affected children were examined.

Claudia Harder, a circus artist from Berlin, began training the children on the trapeze.

Daniela Buck, an architect from Ravensburg, developed architectural sketches after speaking with local builders.

Petra Fronzek, leader of the children's day center "Villa Kunterbunt", participated in developing the concept and in further training for local pedagogues.

Nico Mesterharm of Krossover Medieninitiative produced a 45-minute documentary film called "Joy's House – A Journey towards yourself and others", in which the entire concept is introduced. The film has already premiered in Berlin and in Bangkok.

Lotus Travel Service in Munich donated computers to the school in Pongkum.

Franziska Jai von Seldeneck and Nico von Brueck, working closely with children and teachers, initiated a recycling center alongside the school. Reusable materials from the village's garbage is accepted here and resold.

Joy's Farm sponsored the first children whose families were unable to provide for their schooling. The children attend school and are treated like members of Joy's House on the farm.

The children participated in an event at the Goethe Institute in Bangkok and made their own contribution to the program.

Joy's House held an Ethnic Fashion Show "The Secrets of Lanna" in the Twin Tower Hotel in Bangkok for the benefit of the project. The event was supported by women from the American and German community in Bangkok.

### **Current Standpoint**

The first 15 children have moved to the farm. These are children who lived in unbearable circumstances before they came to the farm – some of them had been left alone in the jungle. 23 other children are cared for in the village. Boarding rooms and a large hut for

group meetings have been built on the farm. Two teachers and three farmers work with the 38 children. Other children from the village are also involved to prevent divides from arising. Approximately 70% of the farm's property is available for the "School for Life" project. 12 of the children attend the elementary school in the village Pongkum. Three of the children will go to the Junior High School in Doi Saket. Currently, the children's projects focus on organic farming and recycling.

### **Planned steps**

The buildings on the children's farm and the small village on the farm will be built gradually over the next four years. Youth, builders and craftsmen from the village will do the building. The curriculum in the school and on the farm will relate to each other in such a way that the institutions expand on each other and can even be coordinated time-wise. Opportunities for guests and visitors to participate will be developed further. People who sponsor children or part of the project can spend their vacation at Joy's House and contact the children, if they would like.

### **Expectations**

The children will, provided that they live so long, be accompanied and mentored until they reach adult age. Access to post-secondary educational institutions should be made possible for them.

Experiences from the project should be processed in such a manner that they can be applied to other situations.

## **7. HOW CAN YOU HELP?**

Help us. With your donations. By sponsoring a child. By visiting Joy's House and volunteering in the School for Life.

The children from the School of Life will thank you for it.

### **HOW TO CONTACT US**

Please visit our homepage:

[www.School-for-Life.org](http://www.School-for-Life.org)

or contact Jens Kronberg:

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## **THAILAND: SCHOOL FOR LIFE: THE CHILDREN'S STORIES**

by Juergen Zimmer, Past President of ICEA  
April 2003

The School for Life provides for children in difficult circumstances. Fifteen such children have already moved to Joy's Farm, where the School for Life is located. Other children are cared for in the village Pongkum. All of the children have their own story. These stories tell of children who show a strong will to live and who have tremendous courage, yet at the same time, have to cope with despair and mourning.

### **THE LAST JOURNEY** -Noppharat "Bill" Yaitong, twelve years old

When the baffled policeman saw the shabby pickup truck travelling down the highway without a driver, he got on his motorcycle, followed the truck, and discovered a young boy at the steering wheel. The policeman stopped the truck and asked the boy if he had lost his mind. The boy gestured to the back seat and replied that his father was lying there, dying. His father, suffering from AIDS, wanted to die at home. That's why he was driving from Pongkum to Lampun. The policeman looked at the father's bleeding sores and waved the boy through.

Bill, ten years old at the time, drove his father the fifteen kilometres from Pongkum to Lampun. They arrived in the afternoon. No one was there. That evening, Bill's father died.

Somewhere far away, the mother waits for death to release her from AIDS. She used to be a waitress, but when Bill last saw her, the restaurant had assigned her to other duties washing dishes next to the kitchen due to her illness.

Bill wants to be a scientist and is a talented flutist. He plays the traditional Thai flute and can improvise on it for hours at a time.

Where did he learn to drive a car? When he was eight years old, simply by watching his father drive.

### **ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE SEVEN HILLS** -Wararee "Wow" Yooyen, nine years old

Her parents came from far away. They journeyed over many mountains. Her mother is from China, and she doesn't know where her mother met her father anymore.

The family is stranded here in the area near Pongkum. Pongkum not only has street children, it also has street families. Wow's family lives on the street, looks for abandoned shacks to sleep in, has neither identification papers nor a national citizenship, and belongs to the caste of illegal migrants: They are always moving around and live in fear of being deported at any time.

Wow tried to reach the school every day from a shelter deep in the jungle. She had to hike over a large mountain. She arrived exhausted after classes had already started, and fell asleep while the others were learning.

Wow's mother heard of the School for Life, came to the farm with Wow and asked to have her daughter taken in and given a good education. As a girl, she is especially in danger on the street. We agreed and encouraged Wow's mother and father to maintain as close contact to their daughter as possible.

“At home”, on the street, the family only ate rice prepared with chillies and salt for 29 days. Wow was often hungry. Now she eats enough for three children and is happy to be here.

What Wow likes best? Pork with crispy edges, and playing the Thai guitar. She wants to be a musician some day. Probably.

**THE BROOM SELLER WHO WANTS TO BE A SOLDIER** -Tanakorn “Mod” Kaipanya, eight years old

When Mod was two years old, his father died of AIDS. His mother didn’t want to accept the idea that she could also be infected with the illness. Now she is waiting, nobody knows where, for her end. Mod’s grandmother took him in. Mod searched for hard grasses in the forest and brought his grandmother the bundles he found. She tied them into short-handled brooms and received twenty Bath a day for her work. Now, Mod’s grandmother feels it is nearly time to die, and asked the School for Life to guarantee Mod a good future.

Mod likes to draw. He believes that he has to be hard to come to terms with his life. He wants to be a soldier some day. We’ll see. Since he has arrived on the farm, he plays like a young child, seems more tender and is slowly forming trust to his new life. He visits his grandmother whenever he wants to.

**THE WOODSMAN** -Wisanutorn “Joe”, twelve years old

Joe lived in a small hut in the jungle. His father died of AIDS when he was three years old. His mother has disappeared. Maybe, says Joe, she has already died. But maybe not, and then she could visit him again. His grandmother lives with him in the hut. Her income: nothing.

So Joe became a woodsman whenever he was hungry. He knows how to dig a mouse out of the ground and eat it, which leaves are edible, how to kill small animals with a slingshot, how to catch fish with home-made fishing gear, and how to protect himself from snakes and scorpions.

Joe is familiar with the hardest form of trekking: Going into the jungle with nothing and yet surviving. Joe wants to become a guide. And play soccer. And attend the School for Life.

**THE SIXTH SENSE** -Nattachai “Boy” Taisamoot, six years old

His mother is on her deathbed, sent home from the hospital in the last stage of AIDS. His father is mentally ill and has usually disappeared into the woods. He is not capable of caring for Boy. Boy’s mother sent him to the School for Life. At night, says Boy, she sends him her sixth sense. Then he cries, packs his things together, waits for dawn and wants to walk to the village to his mother. We accompany him. His mother dies slowly. She speaks gently to Boy and tells him why he will have a good life in the School for Life. Boy says, he doesn’t need the school. He still has 21 Bath in his pocket, and his mother still has 60 Bath. They can live on that. Boy mourns. Everyone on the farm is nice to him. They hug him when he cries, which is often for hours at a time.

**NOT LIFE AND NOT DEATH** -Titinan “Ti” Dato, ten years old

Ti looks like a six year old, small and weedy. He never wants to go back to the street. He used to live there with his family: Four siblings, a pregnant mother and a father without an

income. They often had nothing to eat, because their father didn't find work. When he did find work, he brought about 2 Euros home each day. Six people can live off that in Thailand.

Ti's mother brought him and his seven-year-old brother Non to the farm. She asked that both of them be taken in. They would have no opportunities on the street. Ti says that the worst part was the hunger. Now, for the first time, he is full, and he has a bed and a roof over his head.

Ti wants to be a doctor. And play soccer first. Maybe he will soon grow like a tree.

**THE POOR HARRY POTTER** -Parkpoom "Artchi" Thammagae, seven years old  
Artchi's eyes blink behind thick, round gasses, which he has bound tightly to his head. Without them, he cannot see his five fingers in front of his face. When he laughs – and he likes to laugh mischievously – Artchi becomes Harry Potter. He only has to learn how to do magic.

Artchi's blind mother, led by neighbours, brought Artchi to the farm. Her kidneys are giving out, and she can't afford dialysis, but now that she knows Artchi is in good hands, she can die in peace and hope for a better life afterwards.

Now Artchi belongs to the small community in the School for Life. We will give him the medical attention that he needs and return his sight to him as much as possible. Like him, we would like to do magic and not only help the children, but also help Artchi's mother and all the adults who live or die in difficult circumstances.

**A DOUBLE GOOD-BYE** -Preeyaporn "Nai" Tangswatdiwong, ten years old  
Nutpong "Long" Tangswatdiwong, eleven years old

It could have been three years ago when Nai, her brother Long and her sister Ching woke up and realized that their parents were gone. Poor and in a hopeless situation, they had gone to look for work. To Taiwan, some said. They were never seen again.

An uncle took the children in. He already had three children of his own and a wife, with whom he fought about the new arrivals. One morning, Nai, Long and Ching woke up and saw that their uncle, his wife and the three children had disappeared. He had vanished.

Since then, Nai, Long and Ching live like Haensel and Gretel in a small hut in the jungle. They gather leaves, insects and berries in the woods to survive. They are strong and are not afraid of anything.

Woodsmen from the village found the children and told them about the School for Life. Ching, 17, started on the journey with Nai and Long and brought them to the farm. She thought it was paradise. Ching comes time and again to see how her siblings are doing. She wants to help out on the farm later, when we can provide living space for her. Isn't she afraid to stay alone in the jungle? No, she says, she's not afraid of anything.

Nai (her name means "where are you?") plays the Thai guitar and wants to be a doctor someday. Long (his name means "lost") also wants to be a doctor. He likes to swim and can do everything that a man needs to do to survive in the jungle: from climbing trees to look for ants' nests to washing the dishes.

**THE DILEMMA** -Piyawalee “Kik” Thalomkham, five years old

Piyawadee “Kuk” Thalomkhan, five years old

Kik and Kuk, the twins, have AIDS. Their immune systems are weak. They get sick more and more often, cough and get fevers. Their father died of AIDS when they were one year old. Their mother, ashamed, disappeared. Kik and Kuk live with their grandparents in the village. Their grandparents explained to the school in front of all the parents that even though they know, deep down, that their grandchildren are ill, they cannot accept it. The children’s karma – the Thais call it “gram” – is as it is.

They entrust their grandchildren to the School for Life during the day, and at night, the children sleep at home. The grandparents have refused medical examinations or treatment for the children. They want peace and to let things go their way. Maybe they hope they will die with their grandchildren.

Those of us from the School for Life are in a dilemma. We know that a pharmacist in Thailand, Krisana Kraisintu, has developed a live-saving AIDS medicine. She developed a pill that can effectively fight the virus in a person. For 320 Euros a year, HIV-positive persons can continue their lives; those ill with AIDS can leave their deathbeds and start a second life. This price for one year is approximately 20% lower than the price in Europe.

We don’t know how the story with Kik and Kuk will end, whether or not we will be able to convince the grandparents to value the lives of the children more than their belief in a karma. Time is running out.